

SUPERFAMICOM

THE BOX ART COLLECTION

スーパーファミコン。ボックスアートコレクション

スーパファミコン。ボックスアートコレクション



Written and designed by
Stuart Brett

Editor
Steve Jarratt

Written contributions from
Damien McFerran

Special Thanks to
James Wragg
Masaaki Enami
Van Orton Design

Photography
Alan Rennie Photography

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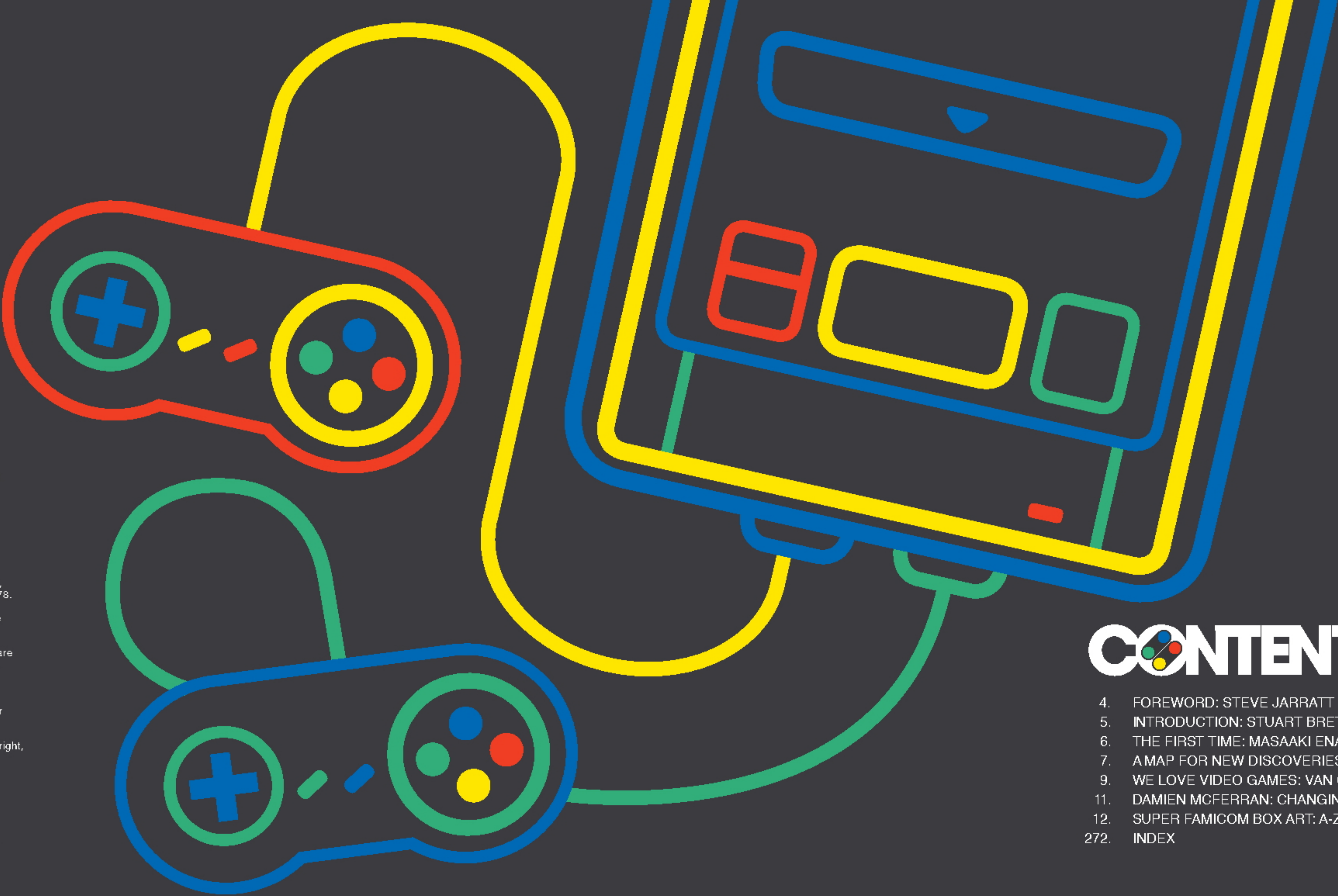
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FOREWORD. STEVE JARRATT

LAUNCH EDITOR, TOTALI, EDGE, OFFICIAL NINTENDO MAGAZINE

I still vividly remember the first time I saw a Super Famicom. I was working at Future Publishing and had just launched Commodore Format magazine, stepping back into 8-bit gaming when everyone else was into 16-bit. Our designer, Lam Tang, had received a unit from Japan and had it set up in the games room (coincidentally, on another TV we had The Simpsons running on VHS, which was the new big thing from the U.S. that everyone was talking about).

The Super Mario World cart was inserted and from that first cheery ‘ba-ding!’, I was hooked. The game looked so smooth and colourful and high-res compared to what I’d been used to (it had four times the pixels of a C64). But it was when Pilotwings took the stage that my jaw dropped. I’d never seen 3D like it, and even though it’s only a fake, distorted 2D layer, it looked fantastic. I promptly bought a modified import console fitted with a SCART lead, and began a love affair that would only be cut short with the arrival of the N64.

Over time I gradually built up a modest library of Japanese import games, often bought at inflated prices. Pilotwings (of course), Actraiser, Super Ghouls ‘n Ghosts, Area 88, Super R-Type, Street Fighter II, F-Zero, Hole in One, Darius Twin, Ganbare Goemon, Axelay, Starwing, Final Fight... (and those are just the ones I recall). I even had a special case to keep my beloved console and joypads in, with a carved foam insert, like the kind special agents use to store their sniper rifles and spy gadgets.

But the Super Famicom did more than usher in a new era of 16-bit console gaming. By delaying the UK release for 18 months – a move unthinkable today – Nintendo forced gamers to dabble in the grey import market. This was something to be worn as a badge of honour: we were hard-core members of an exclusive club, right on the cutting edge of gaming. I also loved the portrait packaging and the unusual, often daring box art, which made international releases look boring and clichéd by comparison.

(When the SNES did finally arrive it was hobbled by the 50Hz PAL TV system, running games 15% slower in a horrible squashed letterbox format. Super Famicom owners simply patted their consoles and looked on smugly.)

But this exposure to import games also helped to broaden our horizons: we were introduced to an otherwise alien world of Japanese artwork and design, of manga and anime characters. For many, this introduction turned into a lifelong passion for oriental art and culture, leading to endless shelves of tapes and DVDs, comic books and figurines of heroes, demons, spaceships and mechs.

It’s been a fascinating journey going through Stuart’s collection, re-familiarising myself with some old favourites and discovering obscure titles I would never have believed existed. This handsome archive offers a great insight into Japanese gaming of the ’90s, from genre-defining classics to gloriously bizarre rarities. So whether you’re a Super Famicom enthusiast of old, a newcomer to retrogaming, or simply a fan of Japanese memorabilia, I’m sure it will be a fabulous addition to your collection.

INTRODUCTION. STUART BRETT

VISUAL DESIGNER, AUTHOR OF SUPER FAMICOM GUY BLOG

I was six years old when my parents bought me a Sinclair ZX Spectrum in 1985. This, and my uncle’s Commodore 16, would be my first experiences with a home computer system designed for playing games, and like all kids I was hooked within minutes. I particularly loved the artwork that came packaged with the cassettes; airbrush and acrylic paintings bundled with fold-out sets of instructions or maps. They looked great on my little shelf alongside my treasured books and records, and I’d spend many happy Sunday afternoons tracing and drawing the characters from my favourite games. I’d later graduate to the Sega Master System, but it would be the Christmas of 1992 that would prove to be the defining moment in my gaming career and properly introduce me to the kinetic, hyperactive world of Japanese gaming.

I received a Super Nintendo, and this incredible 16-bit system opened my eyes to an entirely new world of gaming brilliance. The first two games were Contra Spirits and Super Castlevania IV – both of which possessed an incredibly stylish and cinematic quality which I simply hadn’t witnessed on the 8-bit home micros of the ’80s. The music – multi-layered and in glorious stereo – was far beyond what my little Master System was capable of. It was also the first time I felt closer to playing something at home that reminded me of the arcade machines I loved so much.

Japanese gaming quickly became an obsession and I jumped into the import scene with both feet. Poring over Super Famicom boxes and their contents at import stores became something of a ritual for me; I was playing games that were culturally a million miles away from what was trending in Europe and America. They featured the most memorable covers containing amazingly detailed paintings and lavish illustrations that made western art look positively drab in comparison. Games would come packed with little move cards, maps, handbill flyers or huge, full-colour manuals. The packaging and presentation made every game I bought an absolute joy to own and one I wanted to keep rather than throw away or

trade for something else. The fact that they were printed on cardboard made them all the more precious to me; even as a teenager, I knew that I would have to look after my games with care and that they wouldn’t last forever.

I continued playing my Super Famicom throughout the ’90s before going off to study design at university. Since then I’ve bought many consoles and continue to do so, but none of them have felt as exciting, original or individual as my little Super Famicom. The games and their accompanying artwork had an immeasurable influence on my later days as an art student, but most importantly they were incredibly fun to play.

A decade later I found myself questioning why I was still gaming. The ‘play, trade, repeat’ culture of modern stores had replaced the independent import shops. All of my disc-based consoles and games started to feel and look cheap, generic and disposable. In short, my collection of modern games lacked that zany, colourful Japanese charm that I loved during my formative years. Stuck in a gaming rut, I decided to dust off my little grey console and reacquaint myself with its amazing library of software. This led to further years of collecting and writing via blogs and websites, and now over 20 years after first picking up a Super Famicom pad, I find myself writing the very book you cradle in your hands.

The following is a selection of some of my favourite games from my own archive with a focus on the lush artwork that adorns each cover; a celebration of game design and packaging that has now slipped into obscurity. I hope the following games inspire newcomers to the console or remind fellow ’90s gamers of what an exciting time it was for Japanese game design. As videogames edge ever closer to non-physical media, we may never see presentation and packaging in this traditional form ever again.

THE FIRST TIME. MASAAKI ENAMI

OWNER OF EDITMODE AND THE KING OF GAMES

My first encounter with this super machine came one Sunday. I had been charged with looking after my relatives' children, who lived nearby, while their parents were out. It was the autumn of 1990 and I was just 16. Up until that day I'd played my share of games on the Famicom, the PC Engine and the Mega Drive, but what I saw at my relative's house just blew me away. It was revolutionary: the controller fitted my hands perfectly and the colour scheme for the buttons was so fresh, new and entirely original. And of course, it had an RCA connector to show the graphics off, something my Famicom didn't have!

The first games I played that day were Super Mario World and F-Zero. The leaps and bounds Mario had made on this new console saw me enthralled and over the coming months I became a regular visitor at my relatives from then on. Thinking about it now, I should have probably shown some restraint!

Some time after that, I got my very own Super Famicom. I sank countless hours into the games I loved: Super Mario World, the Megami Tensei series, Zelda, Mother 2, Street Fighter II, Super Formation Soccer, the Dragon Quest series, Super Donkey Kong, Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts and Mario Kart to name just a few.

These are all still classic titles to this day and it's thanks to the great times I spent as a boy playing on the Famicom and Super Famicom that led me to launch my own Nintendo-licenced store in Tokyo, The King Of Games. The Super Famicom introduced many new Nintendo characters, which is why their games are still developed on new consoles. I love new games, but I also love the old ones too. And that's why my Super Famicom will stay hooked up to my TV and I'll keep on playing it. I also plan on using this book to find some undiscovered gems!

A MAP FOR NEW DISCOVERIES. JAMES WRAGG

PROJECT MANAGER, PYRAMID INC.

Like many gamers of my generation, Japanese games have always held a special place in my pixelated heart, and the arcade was where it started. I clamoured after the 'arcade perfect' home console ports – until the PC Engine came along and actually provided them. Specced by Hudson Soft, bastions of the NES, the machine was a developer's dream and the games showed it with R-Type, Gradius, Formation Soccer and more.

I was in gamer's heaven – until that fateful day in October 1990 when Mean Machines issue one hit the UK shelves with word of Nintendo's Super Famicom. The first news came via Japanese magazines and was scarce: a few screenshots and a couple of paragraphs, but the following months saw Super Mario World announced, followed by Pilotwings, F-Zero and line-ups from Capcom and Konami. I then knew what my next console would be.

I got a Japanese console for Christmas '91 and a few carefully selected games: Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts, Actraiser, Ganbare Goemon and Darius Twin. Needless to say, it was a memorable Christmas. The Super Famicom unboxing was exciting in and of itself, but it was gazing at the box art and poring over the manuals with their full colour illustrations that was really special. Whenever I bought a new game, checking the box art then exploring the manual always took first priority. After all, pre-internet purchases were often made on the basis of a single screenshot or word of mouth, so every game held new surprises.

My days with the Super Famicom were spent exploring the weird and the wonderful: KIKi KaiKai, Septentrion, 46 Okunen Monogatari, Super Fire Pro, Albert Odyssey, Kawa no Nushi Tsuru 2, Deae Tonosama Appare Ichiban... the list goes on. Many of these remained Japan-exclusive and it was thanks to this situation, in part, which led to my decision to study Japanese and ultimately live here, becoming part of the games industry along the way and meeting the people who created the games I loved.

At the time of writing, my team and I are in the process of putting the finishing touches to our latest game, Darius Burst: Chronicle Saviours, a particularly special title to have been involved in as I can trace my steps from this game directly back to my days playing the series on the Super Famicom and PC Engine, all those years ago.

Whether this book is for nostalgia or reference, the author's love of the medium will no doubt reignite your old passions or become a map for new discoveries. Either way, I hope it remains on your bookshelf for quite some time. I know it will be on mine.



WE LOVE VIDEO GAMES

VAN ORTON DESIGN

ITALIAN-BASED ILLUSTRATORS

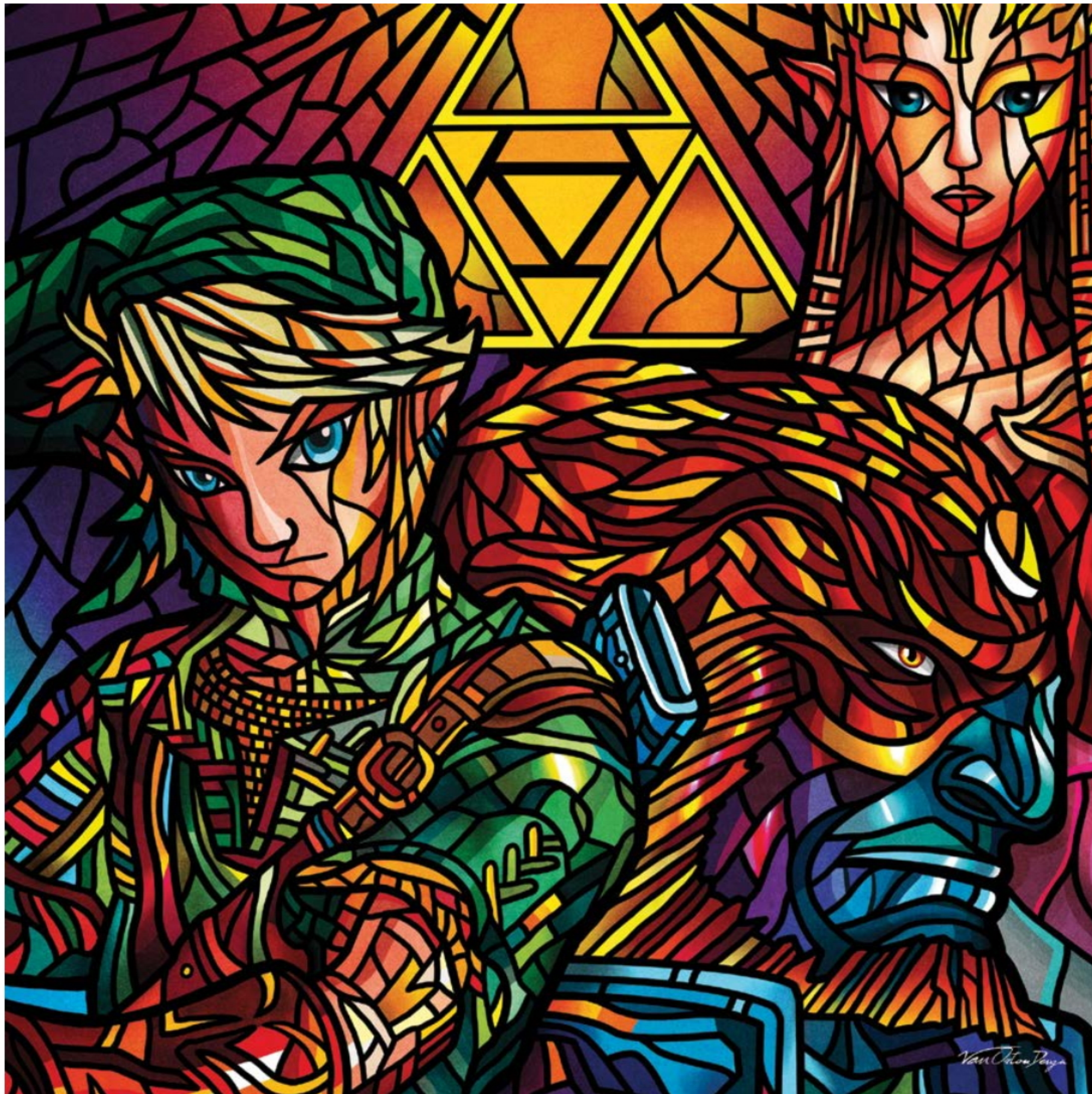
With Van Orton Design, my brother and I pay homage to our teenage years – when cinema and video gaming was truly visionary and innovative. We were inspired by everything that excited us during our teenage years, the sort of visuals that felt 'magic' to us. We try to bring that feeling back in our work. Retro gaming, as it's called now, is more alive today than ever, and I think everyone should rediscover the classics of the past; they had such an influence on my brother and I.

The Super Famicom is the coolest console of all time! Besides the beauty of the games and design of the console, and speaking from a graphic illustrator's perspective, the quality of art used on some of those covers and manuals is absolutely fantastic.

We chose to illustrate Chrono Trigger because it had such an influence on our youth. I think I was too young to understand such a masterpiece at that age, but we love JRPGs and in particular I love Chrono Trigger, perhaps the most beautiful JRPG of all time. Yoshitaka Amano is a great illustrator; the box art for the Super Famicom version is just gorgeous.

Stefan Orton, Sept 2014





CHANGING LANES. DAMIEN MCFERRAN

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, NINTENDOLIFE.COM

Like so many British kids who found themselves badly bitten by the gaming bug in the late '80s and early '90s, magazines like Computer & Video Games and Mean Machines were my window into an exciting new world of sleek, purebred Japanese gaming hardware. Having cut my teeth on my dad's Atari 800 and ST, I knew I wanted to learn more about this fascinating and engrossing hobby, but nothing could prepare me for this unrelenting assault from the Far East. My gaming-mad father purchased a Japanese Mega Drive for Christmas 1990 and essentially transformed me into a card-carrying Sega fan overnight; my allegiance seemingly pledged for eternity.

However, just as the PC Engine surpassed the NES and the Mega Drive overshadowed NEC's diminutive white console, the arrival of Nintendo's Super Famicom eroded my previously unshakable belief in Sega. Initial reports in C&VG told of a system which was even more adept than my beloved Mega Drive, could handle arcade ports with greater skill and – much to my chagrin – had secured the exclusive home port of Capcom's seminal Final Fight, easily my favourite coin-op of the period. I can still remember the biting pang of jealousy as I gazed over those initial Super Famicom screenshots for the game, having previously been hopeful that Sega would repeat the success of its domestic ports of Daimakaimura and Strider Hiryu – both expertly reprogrammed under license from Capcom – and give Sega fans the definitive conversion.

While I was still overwhelmingly happy with Sega's 16-bitter, a fateful trip to my local importers piled on the sense of envy. KC's Console Magic in Loughborough was one of the first shops in the UK to have a Super Famicom freshly imported from Japan, and it's no exaggeration for me to state that witnessing the incredible F-Zero in motion was a life-changing experience. I knew then and there that I would have to put aside any preferential feelings I might have towards Sega and embrace Nintendo's new box of

tricks – a stance that was reaffirmed on a monthly basis as each issue of Mean Machines offered up a new Super Famicom classic to drool over. Actraiser, Pilotwings, Exhaust Heat, Contra Spirits, Super Tennis, Akumajō Dracula, Chōmakaimura – each new Japanese import made the console more tantalising.

My chance came when the console arrived officially in the UK as the Super Nintendo, and my father – ever one for spotting a chance to get ahead of the game – dutifully obtained one of the first converter cartridges available in the West. A flimsy piece of circuit board which lacked any kind of plastic casing, it was annoyingly temperamental but served as a vital gateway to a whole new world of delights. In time I would invest in a proper Super Famicom, which I treasure to this very day – a design classic which looks as attractive now as it did all those years ago in those blurry photos in C&VG magazine.

Subsequent Nintendo consoles have found a place in my heart – the Game Boy is the ultimate portable in my eyes, and I'll treasure those intense multiplayer N64 sessions on GoldenEye 007 until the day I shuffle off this mortal coil – but it was the Super Famicom that cemented my affinity with Nintendo as a creator of games and gaming hardware. That affection has somehow led to gainful employment, and today I'm the Editorial Director and co-owner of Nintendo Life, the world's largest independent Nintendo-centric news, reviews and features site. I know for a fact that I wouldn't be in this position without the Super Famicom; it's a defining hardware platform which shaped the gaming tastes of not only myself but countless others the world over.



46 OKUNEN MONOGATARI: HARUKANARU EDEN HE

46億年物語 - はるかなるエデンへ
ALMANIAC / GAMEPLAN 21 / BNIX (1992)
GENRE: PLATFORM

Known in the West as E.V.O.: The Search for Eden, 46 Okunen Monogatari: Harukanaru Eden he (46 Billion Year Story to Eden) puts the player in control of a primitive organism, born at the very beginning of life on earth. Players choose an evolutionary path with the aid of the Earth's spiritual daughter Gaia. The aim of the game is to evolve, explore and survive over the course of 46 billion years, culminating in the game's ending: entering the gates of Eden and joining Gaia in human form.

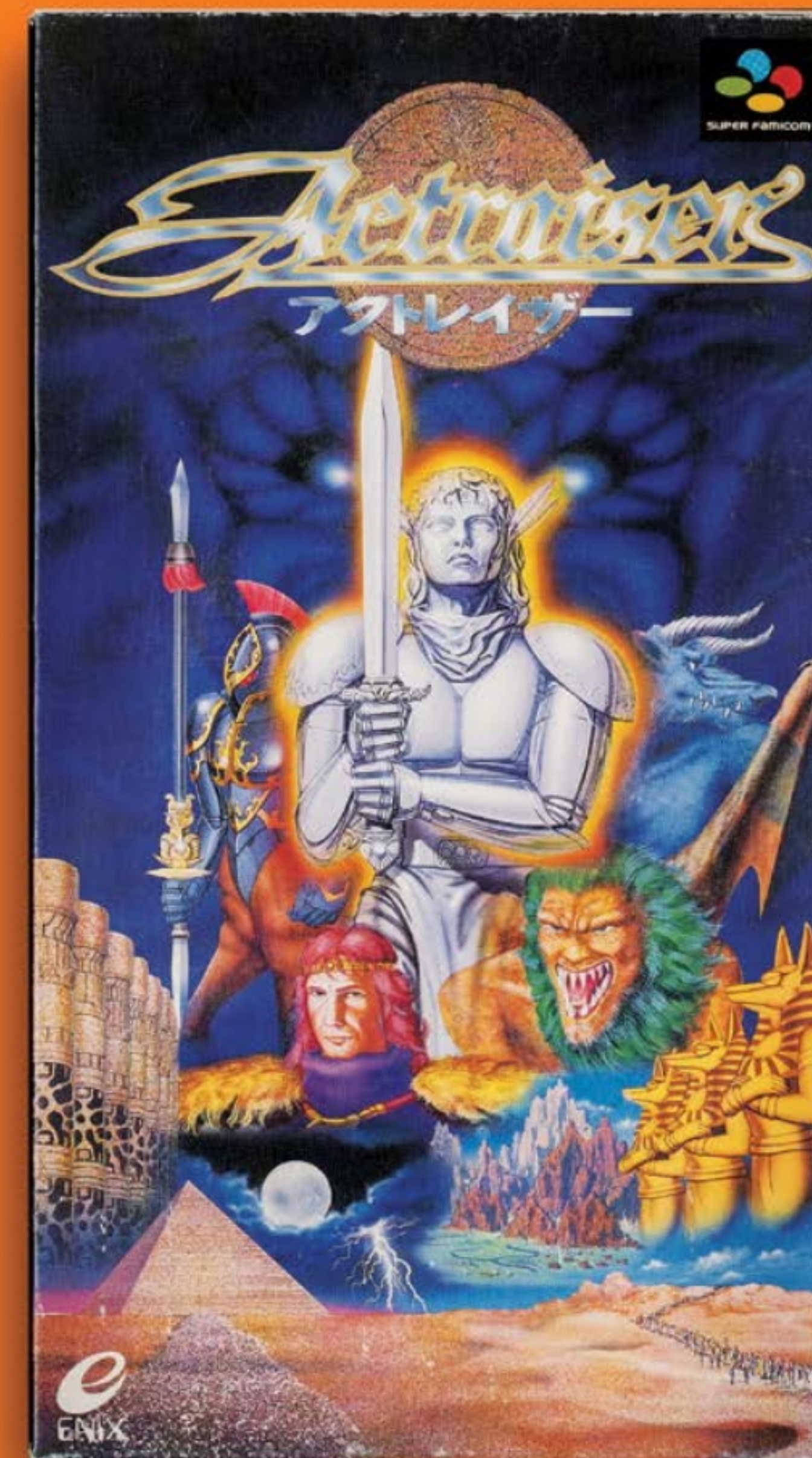
The box art, illustrated by Kamui Fujiwara, contains a more softened, manga-styled artwork than its predecessor, released for the NEC PC9801. The decision to shift the visual style of the Super Famicom version from scientific to fantastical came from the team's Project Director, Takashi Yoneda. The box features a cropped version of the illustration, however the landscape version can be seen in full by folding out the instruction manual's front and back covers, revealing more animals and landscape. Additional cartoon-style drawings are contained throughout its pages, bringing a storybook quality to its contents.

ACTRAISER

アクトレイザー
QUINTET / BNIX (1990)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

After defeating the gods in a bloody war over control of the Earth, Satan and his army of demons split the world into six provinces, each under the rule of a Demon Lord. When a plea is sent to heaven to save the human race, God sends an armoured deity to Earth on a holy mission to clear each province of its demons, restore peace and save civilisation from the clutches of hell.

Actraiser's cover is based on a series of paintings and illustrations originally created for the game's concept art. Five other more detailed paintings are featured in the instruction manual in the form of double-page spreads, all of which set the back-story to the game. The box art successfully depicts each of Actraiser's environments, with its central character, the unnamed deity, surrounded by some of the game's foes in a classic cinema poster arrangement.





ACTRAISER 2: CHINMOKU HE NO SEISEN アクトレイザー2 ~沈黙への聖戦~ QUINTET / ENIX (1993) GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

ActRaiser 2: The Crusade for Silence (which gains an intercap 'R' as per the U.S. release) puts the player back in control of the mysterious deity and in familiar circumstances. Satan has once again taken control of Earth with only God to stop him. With seven demonic forces to defeat, represented as the seven deadly sins, our hero must rid the world of evil and defeat Satan in the final level.

With a gloomier tone than its predecessor's box art, ActRaiser 2's subdued cover depicts civilisation lying in ruins and quite literally slipping into hell. Despite not having any of the game's characters on the cover, the artwork still manages to reference some of the main components with God's 'Cloud Palace' in the top left corner.

AKUMAJŌ DRACULA

悪魔城ドラキュラ
KONAMI (1991)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT



Akumajō Dracula (Super Castlevania IV) is essentially a remake of the original classic, released for the Famicom Disk System in 1986. Set in 1600s Transylvania, the curse of Dracula has returned. After a century of peace, the vampire appears with his castle materialising in a cloud of mist. Our hero, Simon Belmont, is tasked with sending the vampire back to hell and fulfilling his family's life-long oath, a never-ending duty passed down from generation to generation that each Belmont son must face every 100 years.

With its switch to landscape format (the first Super Famicom box art to do so), Akumajō Dracula's cover fills every space with bats and swinging chandeliers, set against a blood-red Transylvanian landscape and providing everything that's synonymous with Count Dracula. The game's cleverly designed logo also features some classic vampire themes with dripping blood and a creepy castle incorporated into the typeface.



AKUMAJŌ DRACULA XX

悪魔城ドラキュラXX

KONAMI (1994)

GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

Known as Castlevania: Vampire's Kiss in Europe, XX is another remake, this time based on a title designed for the NEC PC Engine, named Akumajō Dracula X: Chi no Rondo. The Super Famicom entry plays as a simplified version of its PC Engine counterpart with fewer levels and revised music and level design. Taking place in 1792, Dracula has once again returned and the game's protagonist, Richter Belmont, is tasked with defeating the vampire and rescuing his kidnapped beloved from the clutches of evil.

Akihiro Yamada's distinctive artistic style brought a fresh, delicate and less clichéd look to Castlevania's packaging. With a style more akin to the cut-scenes that can be seen in the original PC Engine game, Yamada's anime-inspired illustration looks as if it might be a frame taken from an animation. With clever use of pale yellows to highlight the Moon, Richter and Dracula, Yamada creates a balanced and engaging design.

ALIEN³

エイリアン3

PROBE / ACCLAIM (1993)

GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

Rather than adhering closely to the film's plot, Probe Design's Alien³ takes a different direction, in which the player controls Ripley armed with the Colonial Marine weapons from the 1986 James Cameron classic, Aliens. Ripley must rescue the prisoners of Fury-161, incinerate egg infestations and ultimately defeat the Alien Queen before sacrificing herself in order to prevent Weyland-Yutani from taking the Alien growing inside her.

Alien³ was released for the Amiga, Commodore 64, Game Boy, Mega Drive, Master System and Super Nintendo, and each contained identical artwork that was consistent with the promotional materials for the film. The Super Famicom cover, however, has an entirely unique design. The cinema poster art is replaced with a photographic composite of two different Alien images placed in front of a typically Giger-esque backdrop. The use of bright green is used throughout the cover, despite the film having a distinctive grey and brown palette.





ALIENS VS PREDATOR

エイリアンVS.プレデター

JORUDAN / IGS / ACTIVISION (1993)

GENRE SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

The year is 2493. On colonial planet Vega 4, during routine construction work in the city of New Shanghai, an Alien egg infestation is unearthed, unleashing a wave of vicious xenomorphs. The planet quickly descends into chaos with the colonists unable to stop the Alien horde. A distress signal is broadcast to Earth, which is intercepted by a passing Predator ship. The Predator clan decide to land on Vega 4 and hunt the xenomorphs as the ultimate trophy. This was the first Alien Vs Predator video game to be released, with Capcom's arcade game following shortly afterwards.

Developer Jorudan chose to use existing photography from the films as box art. The image of the Alien is actor Bolaji Badejo wearing the original latex suit, taken on the set of Ridley Scott's Alien in 1978. On the left is a screen still of Kevin Peter Hall as the Predator, taken from John McTiernan's 1987 film. The International release, published by Activision, contains an illustration that leans more towards a comic book style.

APPLESEED: PROMETHEUS NO SHINTAKU

アップルシード プロメテウスの神託
VISIT (1994)

GENRE SCROLLING COMBAT

In this cyberpunk action game from Visit, we play as ESWAT officers Deunan Knute and cyborg Briareos Hecatonchires as they fight to protect the utopian city of Olympus from a terrorist organisation. The terrorists wish to destroy the Bioroids, a genetically engineered species who live alongside humans. Deunan and Briareos must discover who is behind the mysterious terror group and prevent them from wiping out the Bioroid race.

Based on Masamune Shirow's hugely successful manga series, Appleseed: Oracle of Prometheus, follows the story of the original four books released in the 1980s. The illustration by Shirow is taken directly from these works and depicts Deunan and Briareos against a futuristic cityscape. Deunan's posture, body armour and weaponry is reminiscent of another of Shirow's female character creations, Major Motoko Kusanagi from Ghost in the Shell.





ARAIGUMA RASCAL: RACCOON RASCAL

あらいぐまラスカル

JFORCE / MASAYA (1994)

GENRE: PUZZLE

Rascal the Raccoon was an anime series produced by Nippon Animation in Japan in 1977, based on Sterling North's 1963 autobiographical account of his life growing up in Wisconsin. The series was fondly remembered in Japan, so much so that this puzzle title was developed for the Super Famicom in 1994. It's a unique take on the 'Match 3' genre, where instead of using a cursor to manipulate a series of glass jars, you use a character – either Rascal or his human master, Sterling – who pick up the jars manually and set them in place.

Sterling is nowhere to be seen in this homely, pastel-effect cover for Araiguma Rascal, but the guilty-looking raccoon looks like he's been caught with his hand in one of the candy jars that feature in the game. This charming image features character design by Masaharu Endo.

AREA 88

エリア88

CAPCOM (1991)

GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

Area 88 is based on Kaoru Shintani's manga series of the same name. The game doesn't follow any of the original storylines but does use environments, military aircraft and characters from the series, which centres on Shin Kazama, a fighter pilot and new recruit to the Area 88 mercenary fighter pilot base. Shin agrees to a three-year contract that takes him across several conflicts around the world. Determined to earn \$1.5 million to buy his way out of the contract and return home, killing bounties quickly becomes second nature as he climbs the ranks at Area 88, winning admiration from his fellow mercenaries and infamy amongst his enemies.

The box design pays tribute to the style and theme of the original manga series by using the official logo and an original illustration by Shintani. Its simplistic cut 'n' paste execution works well due to the strength of the original content. The 1989 Capcom arcade version of Area 88 also pays homage to the manga by using Shintani's artwork for its flyer.



ASHITA NO JOE

あしたのジョー

KAC AMUSEMENT LEASING CO. (1992)

GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP



Tomorrow's Joe is based on the 1960's manga series written by Ikki Kajiwara and illustrated by Tetsuya Chiba. In the game we play as Joe Yabuki, a troubled runaway orphan who finds an escape from the slums of Tokyo by fighting as a professional boxer. Joe's aim to climb the bantamweight division however is fraught with danger in the guise of various opponents from the manga series. Joe's opponents include Wolf Kanagushi, Tiger Ozagi, Harimau and others. The game culminates with Joe facing the renowned fighter, Jose Mendoza.

The cover illustration is by the manga artist Tetsuya Chiba. Joe is cast against a deep blue backdrop as he prepares to throw a left hook, and a sense of movement is created by the coarse brush marks that sweep across the cover. The game's title, set in contrasting red is also rotated to match Joe's movements and to heighten the sense of action. Ashita No Joe was one of Japan's most-loved manga series between the late 1960s and early 1970s. When the author decided to kill off the character Tooru Rikiishi, a symbolic real-life funeral was held for him at the publisher's headquarters. Tetsuya Chiba attended along with hundreds of fans in a service held in a makeshift boxing ring.

ASSAULT SUITS VALKEN

重装機兵ヴァルケン

NCS CORP / MASAYA (1992)

GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

Also known as Cybernator, Assault Suits Valken is the second instalment of the Assault Suits series, along with its predecessor, Leynos, which was released for the Sega Mega Drive. Taking place in 2101, a war wages between colonial and federation forces over the ownership of the Moon – a tactical location for both military and natural resources. You play as Jake, a first class pilot from the Assault Suits Squadron, tasked with overthrowing the colonies and undertaking the federation's most dangerous missions.

The illustrator creates dynamic perspective with pipes and wires feeding into the mech from the bottom of the illustration, giving the static subject some dynamism and a path for the eye to work its way into the centre of the artwork. It's a perfectly executed technical illustration that mirrors the game's tone. Hues are suitably war-themed, earthy and muddy, and the artist makes use of every part of the available space by filling it with detail.





AXELAY

アクスレイ

KONAMI (1992)

GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

The Iliis solar system has been invaded by the Dark Empire, an alien army determined to wipe out all other forms of life. A joint programme is formed by the Iliis defence forces which design a ship to combat the invasion. That ship is the Axelay, a small multi-purpose space fighter. A military strategy is formed and special weaponry is developed for the ship and concealed on various planets. These weapons strengthen the Axelay's attack capabilities, making it more powerful as it works its way into the very heart of the Dark Empire.

Similar to Phalanx and Assault Suits Valken, the artist behind the Japanese version of Axelay works wonders with the use of perspective. Strong lines created by the ship and laser beams create a propulsive look to the action it contains. The artwork is executed with some technical panache.

BASTARD!! ANKOKU NO HAKAISHIN

バスタード!! - 暗黒の破壊神 -

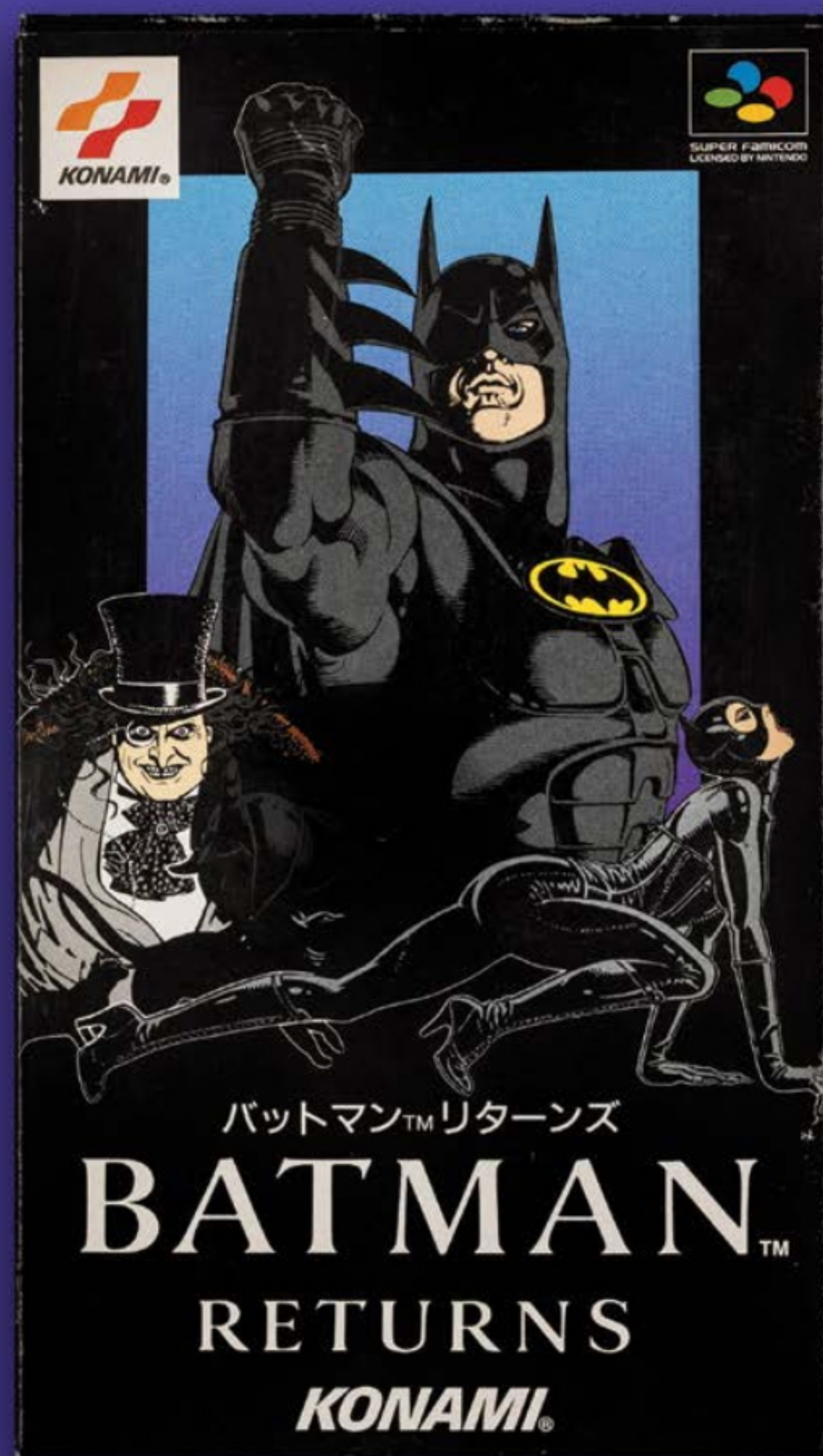
COBRA TEAM (1994)

GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

Bastard!! God of Dark Destruction is a one-on-one fighting game, based on the manga and anime series by Kazushi Hagiwara. The series follows the exploits of the legendary immortal wizard Dark Schneider and his war against his former associates the Lords of Havoc. Each fight takes place in a Mode 7 pseudo-3D environment, with each character airborne. Players can fly to either side of the screen, with one player positioned in the foreground, while their opponent is situated in the background. During battle, you can switch location in order to gain an advantage over your opponent. Playable characters include Dark Schneider, Ninja Master Gara, second General Kall-Su, Dark Priest Abigail, Thunder Empress Arshes Nei and Sorcerer Di-Amon.

The box art is a composite of two illustrations by Hagiwara: the image of Dark Schneider is a cropped drawing, taken from one of the front covers of the manga, and the image of Tia Noto Yoko, shown at the bottom of the design, is taken from a separate issue. Despite its crude layout, the design still manages to reflect the manga series by use of the comic's logo.





BATMAN RETURNS

バットマン リターンズ

KONAMI (1993)

GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

This highly acclaimed movie tie-in takes the player through seven scenes featured in the Tim Burton film. Batman is equipped with a variety of weapons and moves, including a grappling hook and Batarang. Each level contains hordes of henchmen to fight, plus boss characters including the Penguin and Catwoman. This scrolling fighter maintains a consistent pace and theme, however by the fifth level, the Final Fight-esque gameplay is replaced with an action-packed driving sequence involving the Batmobile and the Red Triangle Circus gang on motorcycles.

Both the North American and European Super Nintendo versions of the game opted for imagery taken from the film. However, the Japanese box art has stood the test of time with its stylish illustration by Steve Erwin, the artist behind the official comic book adaptation. Unlike the Super Nintendo box, this design completely removes marketing text and instead focuses purely on what the comic is renowned for – the characters and the artwork.

BATTLE BLAZE

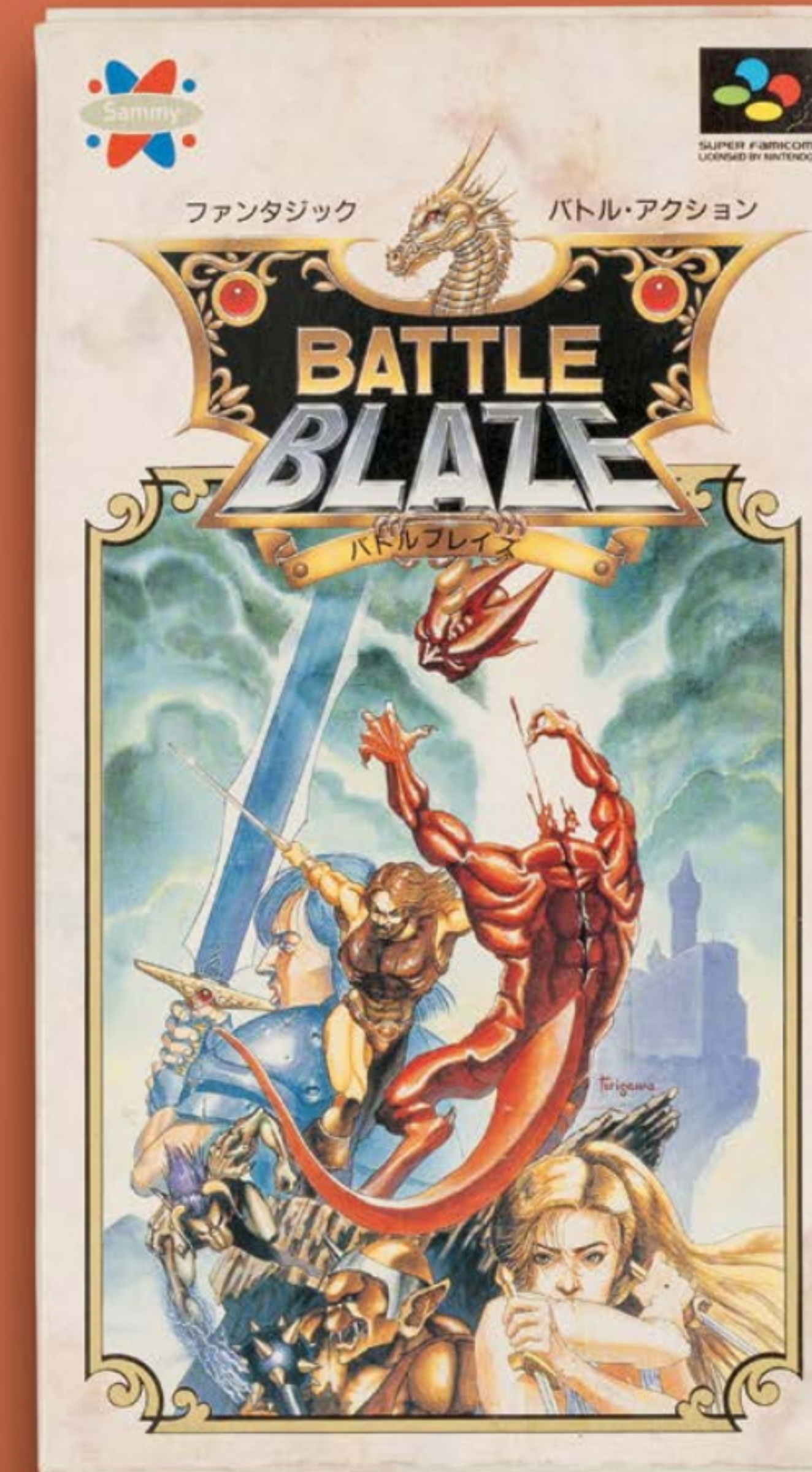
バトルブレイズ

SAMMY (1992)

GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

In a time when peace prevailed around the world, a land called Virg flourished under the rule of a powerful king. As was the custom, each king was selected at the Tournament of Champions. During this contest, a demon arose from the netherworld and possessed several of the swordsmen in an attempt to win and rule over the land. One fighter, Durill, resisted the forces of evil but was struck with a fatal blow. His son Kerrel vows to avenge his father's death and takes his place in the tournament. Let battle commence!

The box art for Battle Blaze was created by fantasy artist and Godzilla illustrator, Yasushi Torisawa, who also designed the original Japanese logo used in Sega's Golden Axe. Its slightly awkward composition only adds to the intrigue of the artwork. The game's swords and sorcery plot and imagery lean heavily towards Robert E. Howard's Conan The Barbarian series and Torisawa's illustration matches that tone.





BATTLE CROSS

バトルクロス

A-MAX / IMAGINEER (1994)

GENRE: RACING

This fun and frantic four-player game is reminiscent of Atari's Super Sprint and Badlands. An isometric perspective is used to display the entire track and its racers, allowing each player to see where the other is situated on one shared screen. Players race on futuristic hover bikes and compete over 12 courses to be crowned Battle Cross champ. Weapons, obstacles and power boosts can be obtained during each race.

Battle Cross is a light-hearted, multiplayer-focused game, and its box art mirrors this family-fun aesthetic. Each bizarre character from the game's story mode is transformed from pixels into brush strokes. Imagineer crafted a game and a cover design that's Japan-centric, great fun to play and bursting with charm. The box art is illustrated by Katsutoshi Fujioka, character designer for Hanjuku Hero, GB SaGa series and cover illustrator for Marukatsu Famicom and PCE.

BATTLE DODGE BALL II

バトルドッジボールII

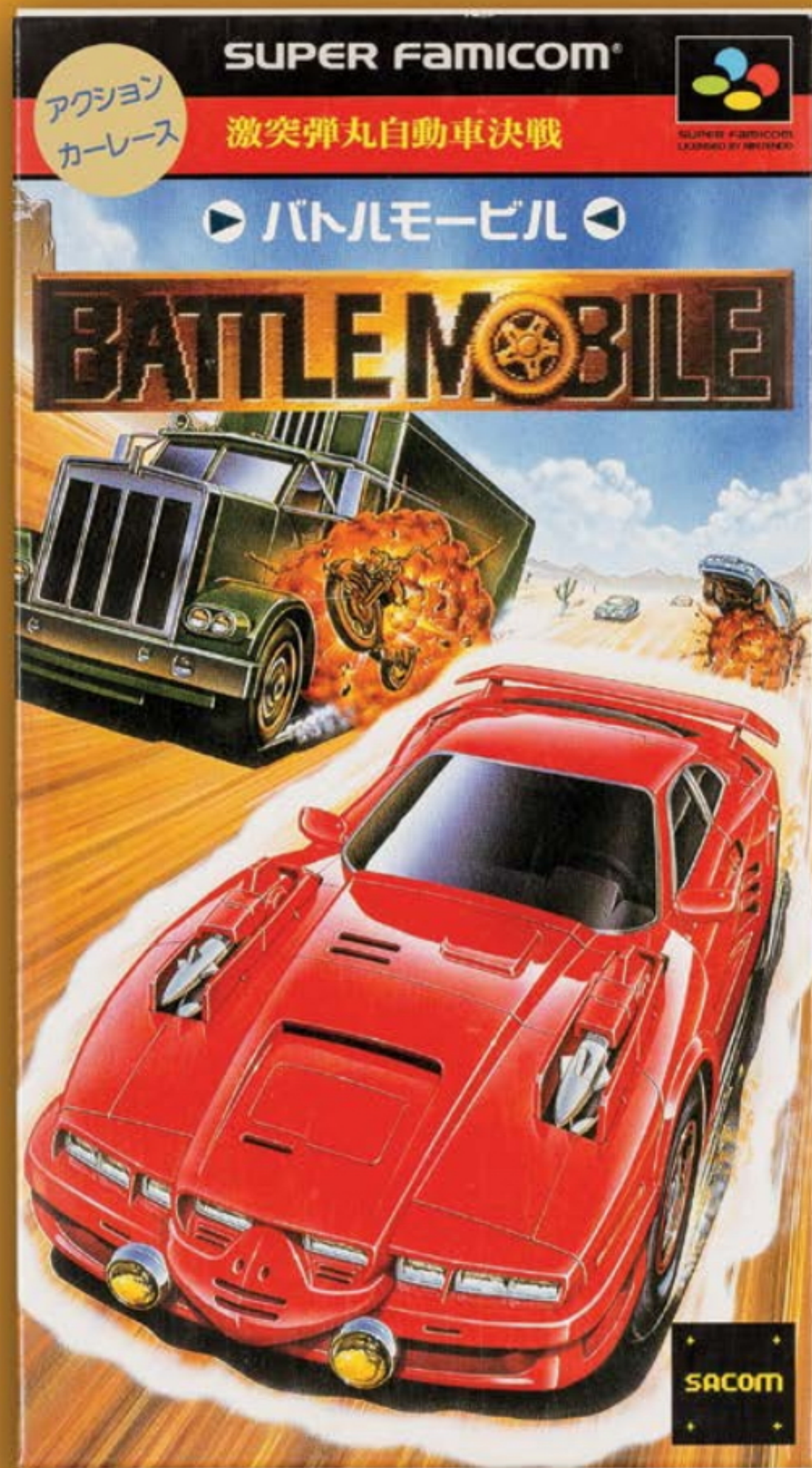
BANPRESTO (1993)

GENRE: SPORTS

Battle Dodge Ball II belongs to the Compati Hero series – a long list of titles which were released exclusively in Japan by Banpresto and Bandai across various consoles and handhelds and acted as crossover vehicles to promote their toys. Each game contained a roster of characters from franchises including Ultraman, Kamen Rider and Gundam. Various genres were produced from sports, platform and pinball to RPGs and Pachinko. Characters were typically portrayed in 'Super Deformed' (SD) mode, another spin-off toy design style that originated from the Gundam toy series, and which enjoyed huge success in Japan during the early 1990s. Battle Dodgeball II was Banpresto's second outing on the Super Famicom and its play mechanics mimic the Technos Dodgeball series.

With its simple, schoolbook-style sketch of SD characters, this box design communicates directly to its demographic of Japanese elementary school kids. The visual style of Compati Hero sports games continues to this day, with PSP boxes using the same composition and art style.





BATTLE MOBILE

激突弾丸自動車決戦バトルモビル
SYSTEM SACOM (1993)
GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP / DRIVING

Gekitotsu Dangan Jidōsha Kessen: Battle Mobile is a relatively obscure Japanese exclusive, which was released in small numbers. It takes inspiration from the Mad Max films and its story and game design borrow heavily from titles such as Data East's Road Avenger and Bally Midway's Spy Hunter. The back-story to Battle Mobile takes place in Spring 2029, with a newlywed couple racing through a post-apocalyptic desert en route to their honeymoon destination. A criminal biker gang spot their car in the distance and decide to rob them. However, the crime goes horribly wrong, resulting in the wife being killed at the hands of the gang. A year on and our hero, now a dishevelled version of his former self, has built a heavily armoured and weaponised vehicle with which he sets out to seek revenge.

The composition of the illustration enables the box to contain plenty of action while also illustrating some of the game's key elements. Our hero's red sports car is in full view, while an exploding motorcycle strikes the side of a marauding truck, depicting a scene directly from one of the game's levels. The perspective, vibrant colours and speed-blurred road create an illustration that leaps out of the box.

BATTLE PINBALL

バイオメタル
BANPRESTO (1995)
GENRE: PINBALL

This excellent pinball game is another Compati Heroes release by Banpresto. All the gang from the Gundam, Ultraman and Kamen Rider series return and each character has their own Pinball-themed level to tackle, complete with bad guys and mini-bosses. Each level contains a playfield that can reach up to three screens high and a variety of themes are available from football stadiums, forests and racetracks to space stations and Tokyo cityscapes.

The artwork follows the previous style of Compati Heroes games, with its Super Deformed characters and brightly coloured backdrops. Its vivid colours reflect the game's vibrant mix of themes and locations. Battle Pinball is often overlooked by collectors, but beneath the simplistic and pre-school themed Banpresto packaging lies an addictive and challenging game that's as rich and complex with its level design and scoring strategy as it is fun and easy to pick up and play.





BATTLE ZEQUE DEN

バトル ゼクウ 伝

ARSYS SOFTWARE /

IMAGEWORKS / ASMIK (1994)

GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

Battle Zeque Den is a scrolling fighter that borrows elements from Journey to the West, the 16th Century Chinese novel that's referred to in Western popular culture as Monkey. Developer Asmik put its own twist on the story by turning the novel's characters Pigsy, Monkey and Sands into teenage girls. You choose to play as martial artist Kairu, boxer Hamusu or sorcerer Rufu, and each girl is associated with an elemental spirit: Fire, Water or Earth. The game features various levels including mountains, temples, deserts, swamps and caves, while enemies range from ninjas and demons to rock golems and wolf men.

Battle Zeque Den gameplay features graphics and characters that are and rich and detailed. This visual style can be traced directly to the various hand-drawn illustrations and character designs contained throughout the manual. This cover by Masaki Takei, better known for the Sotsugyo, Tanjō and Dōkyūsei games, uses three separate illustrations and combines them with a clean white backdrop and vertically-stretched typography. Battle Zeque Den also featured heavily in Japanese magazines before its launch as full-page adverts and these contained alternative (and arguably more balanced) artwork. This illustration can also be found on the back cover of the manual.

BIOMETAL

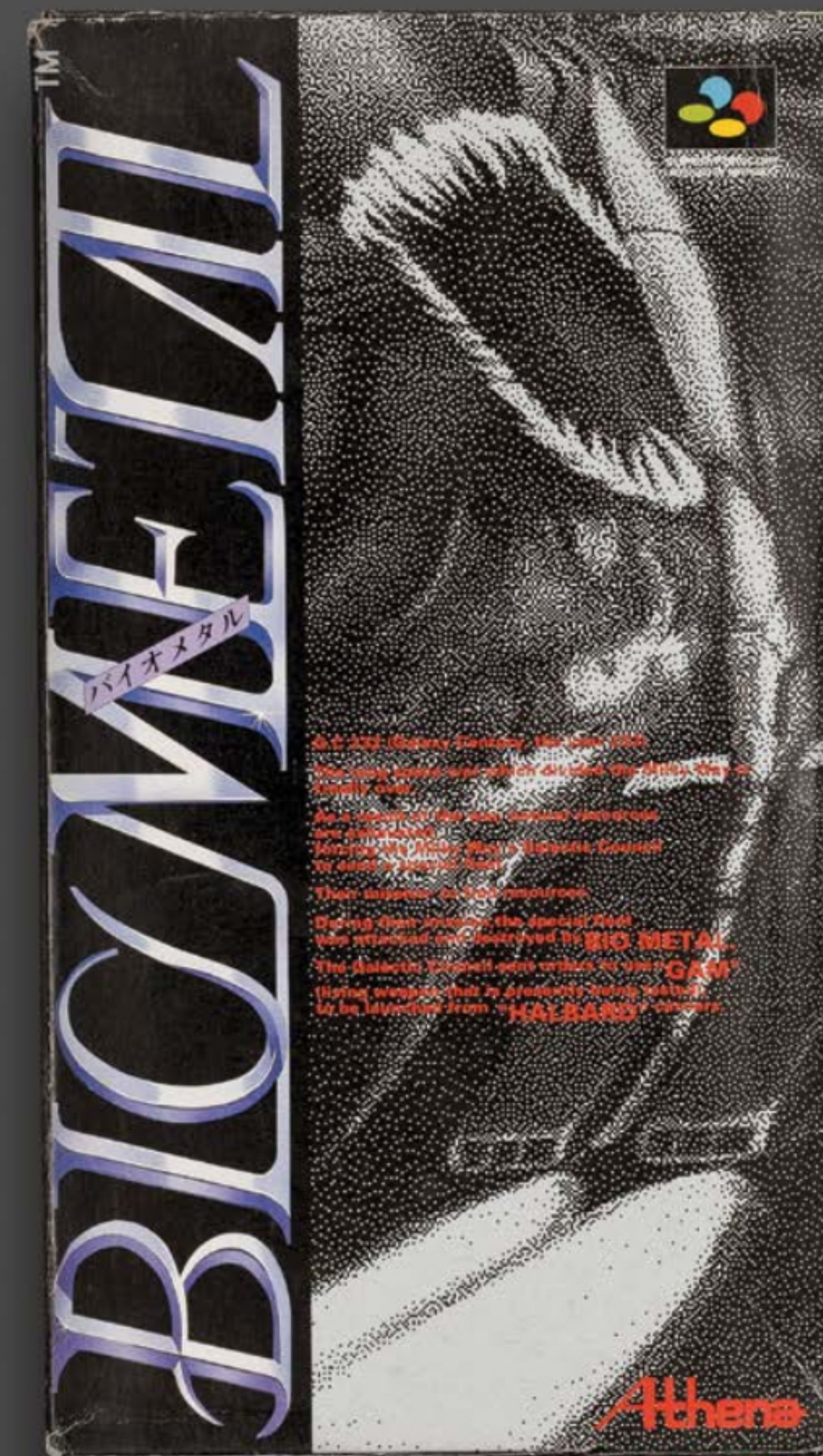
バトルピンボール

ATHENA (1993)

GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

This futuristic shooter takes place in the year GC 232 (Galaxy Century Year 232), when, following a war that depleted the Milky Way's natural resources, the Galactic Council sends a fleet of starships to planet UP457. Their mission: scan the surface for resources that can help replenish their battle-torn forces. During the mission, the fleet is destroyed by a race of biomechanical aliens referred to as 'BioMetal' by the council, an alien threat that quickly spreads across the planet. The council's supercomputer analyses the creatures and predicts that the Milky Way will be consumed by the aliens within 32 hours. Another Military fleet is dispatched to UP457, codenamed WASP, with orders to eliminate all of the BioMetal forces using their new test weapon, GAM. Pilot Kid Ray and biologist Anita spearhead the mission. The Japanese version of BioMetal contains an excellent soundtrack written by Yoshio Nagashima. However, this was scrapped and re-written for its American release with a new soundtrack provided by techno pop band, 2 Unlimited.

BioMetal's cover art is incredibly abstract, with a visual style that sits between dot-matrix print and pointillist expressionism. Oddly, Athena chose not to use Masaki Ohno's ship and enemy art in its original state and instead outsourced the box design to an uncredited designer, who distorted his artwork, making the image almost impossible to identify. BioMetal remains a cult game, and one that was produced in low numbers, making it a rarity in Japan and also for collectors seeking a version that employs a different soundtrack.





BISHŌJO SENSHI SAILOR MOON

美少女戦士セーラームーン
ANGEL (1993)
GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

Derived from Naoko Takeuchi's seminal shōjo manga series, Sailor Moon, this Final Fight-style brawler allows a pair of players to take control of two of the five heroines depicted in the manga. Taking place during the early portion of the Sailor Moon narrative, Bishōjo Senshi Sailor Moon adheres to the pretty standard side-scrolling brawler template, and was ported to the Sega Mega Drive in the following year – minus the two-player option and with other changes. Thanks to the popularity of the manga series among French readers, a PAL Super Nintendo version was produced for that region in 1994, with Bandai handling the publishing duties.

As colourful and eye-catching as the hyperactive manga series from which it is taken, the cover artwork for Bishōjo Senshi Sailor Moon showcases the five main characters – Usagi Tsukino, Ami Mizuno, Rei Hino, Makoto Kino and Minako Aino – as well as Mamoru Chiba, Usagi's love interest, who often aids the Sailor Soldiers in battle. The artwork was retained for the French SNES release, but badly cropped to fit the landscape design.

BLACKTHORNE – FUKUSHŪ NO KUROKI TOGE

ブラックソーン 復讐の黒き棘
BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT / KEMCO (1995)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT



After breaking out of a military prison, Kyle Vlaros – a renowned soldier and mercenary – begins to have weird dreams in which he speaks with a strange figure called Galadril. He is told he is the descendent of a ruler from another planet and that he was sent to Earth as a child to protect the lightstone that was given to him at birth. Kyle must return to his home planet of Tuul, save his people from the evil tyrant Sarlac, and reclaim his throne as rightful heir of the lightstone.

Blackthorne's cover is by Jim Lee, an established comic book artist who's worked on several series for both DC and Marvel comics. The Super Famicom box takes the Super Nintendo art and crops it with a letterbox-style frame in white. The logo is made more prominent by positioning it between the frame and the art, giving both content and branding equal balance. This alternative composition creates a cleaner visual style while also being faithful to the original source material. Additional art by Lee can be seen within the pages of the instruction manual.



BLAZEON

ブレイゾン
AI / ATLUS (1992)
GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

An exploratory mission takes the Imperial Earth Army to the farthest corners of the Galaxy, but the human forces meet their match when an evil alien life form transforms them into Bio-Cyborgs. The army returns to Earth and begins expanding its rule across the universe. A group of resistance fighters strike back and send their greatest weapon, the Garland TTF-01 spaceship, on a mission to destroy the Bio-Cyborgs and restore peace to Earth and the universe.

Blazeon's striking anime-styled artwork makes great use of parallel perspective by placing objects at various distances; the Garland TTF-01 hurtles towards the path of a hulking space mech, while others hastily join the fray. All of this is set against the backdrop of a vast mechanical ship, curving into the distance. It's an illustration that successfully conveys the action and content depicted in the game.

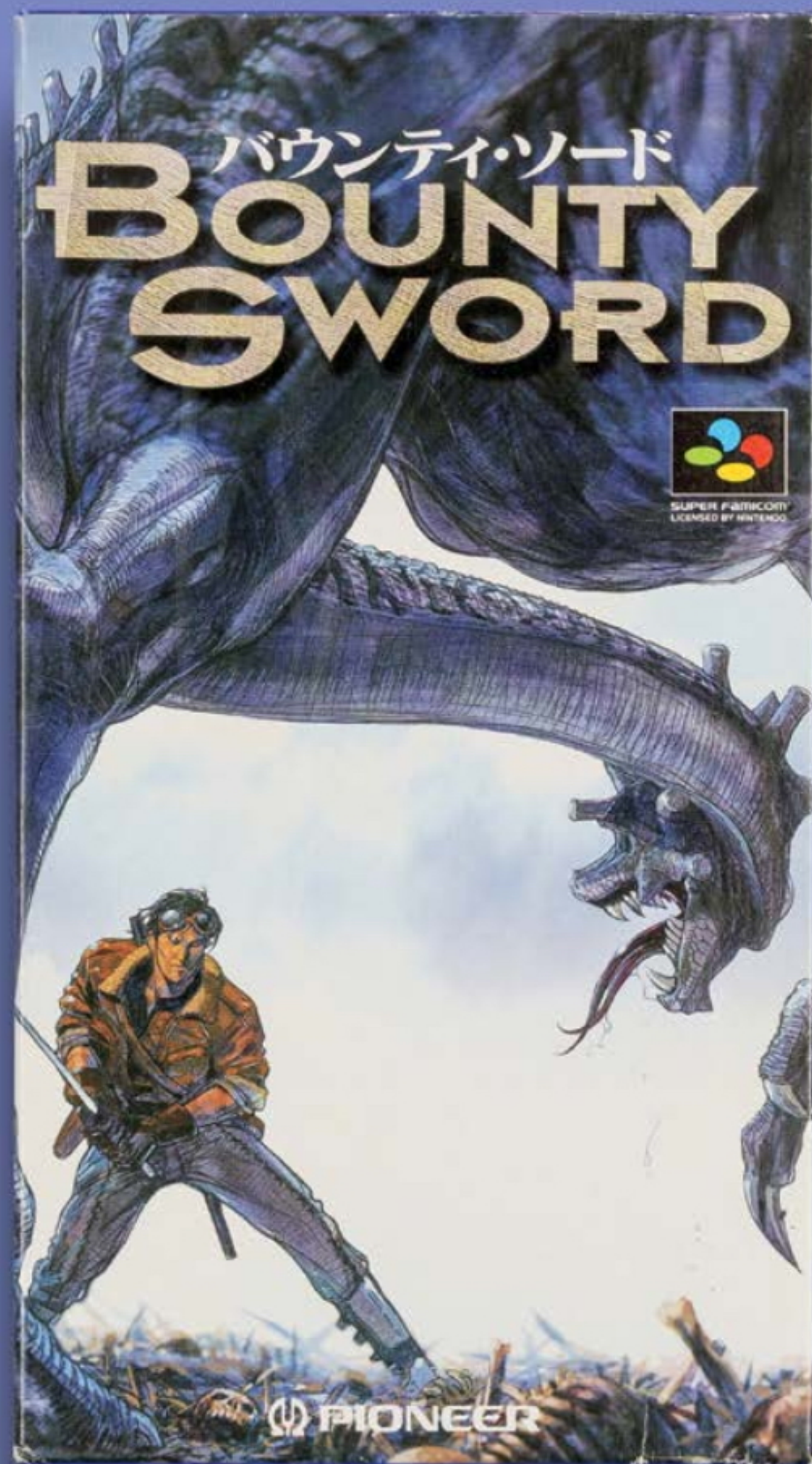
BOMBERMAN B-DAMAN

ボンバーマン ビーダマン
HUDSON SOFT (1996)
GENRE: PUZZLE



B-Daman is a marble shooting game franchise by Japanese toy manufacturers, Takara. This hugely successful toy series included a franchise crossover with Hudson Soft's own Bomberman series. These marble-shooting characters would become part of an animated TV series to promote the toy line, and to further strengthen the brand, Hudson produced a tie-in video game. Bomberman B-Daman contains similar elements to the original Bomberman games but the focus is placed on puzzle-solving rather than multiplayer and Bombermen are replaced by similar looking characters that shoot marbles from their chests.

In what has to be one of the most unique Super Famicom Boxes, Hudson Soft chose to have a limited edition gold Bomberman B-Daman toy included with the game – a calculated move that would appeal to fans of the television series, toy line and the Bomberman video games series. In a break with the SFC's tradition, this box was produced with a thicker cardboard stock and gloss coating and also contains an acetate window to display the little figure. The artwork on the cover doesn't refer to the game but instead focuses on selling the exclusive toy. It's a unique footnote in the history of Hudson Soft's Bomberman series.



BOUNTY SWORD

バウンティ・ソード
HEADQUARTERS /
PIONEER IDC (1995)
GENRE RPG / STRATEGY

This real-time strategy RPG from Pioneer was intended to be the first chapter of a trilogy of games but its sequel only saw the light of day on the PlayStation. The game takes place in 4093, during a war that's started by the 'Hand of God', an army which invades the northern continent. We play as Sword, who in his younger years was a 'glorious knight of the unbeaten' but now struggles to earn a living as a lowly bounty hunter and tries to forget his past by drinking. One day he meets a mysterious young girl, named Fu yurisu, who changes the path of his destiny by forcing him to embark on a great adventure. Following its release, a seven-part radio mini-series was broadcast in 1995, written by the game's director Hiroshi Yamaguchi.

Bounty Sword's cover positions its subjects perfectly with Sword standing ready, weapon in hand, facing off against a huge dragon that covers almost half of the box. Its contorted, twisting body creates a suitable space for the game's branding while generating a sense of movement and drama. The brave use of white space adds a sense of anticipation, while the corpse-strewn ground is a bleak reminder of the potential outcome. Concept art is by Mahiro Maeda and Yuki Ohtake is credited for the character illustrations.

BRANDISH

ブランディッシュ
IALCOM / KOEI (1994)
GENRE RPG

Brandish begins with swordsman Ares Toraernos facing his nemesis, the sorceress Dela Delon, who seeks revenge after Ares killed her master. When Dela strikes at Ares, her magic causes the ground beneath them to collapse and they both tumble into the ruins of the long lost city, Vittoria, a thousand-year-old metropolis once guarded by a dragon. The player assumes the role of Ares and must escape from the ruins with the vengeful Dela constantly in pursuit.

This accomplished illustration by Yuuki Nobuteru depicts Dela at the centre of an intertwining dragon and furling red cape that envelops the design, forming a frame for the artwork. Ares' sword is brought to the fore with stylised use of perspective, creating depth and adding a number of points for the eye to move to and assess. The fiery red palette and dragon-toothed typography complete this stylish and memorable box design.





BUSHI SEIRYŪDEN: FUTARI NO YŪSHA

青龍伝 二人の勇者
GAME FREAK / T&E SOFT (1997)
GENRE TACTICAL RPG

Bushi the Blue Dragon Legend: The Two Heroes takes place in a magical world created by the emperor of light, goddess of the mountains and the god of the ocean. We play as Jin, a young samurai in training. His sister, Nami, is kidnapped by the monsters of the ocean god and Jin sets out to rescue her. Joining him on his journey are Wokū and Miko, floating beasts who were once human and act as aids throughout his mission. Bushi is an early game from Game Freak, a development team more commonly known for creating the Pokémon series for Nintendo. Elements of Bushi's game design and music share a commonality with the later released Pokémon titles.

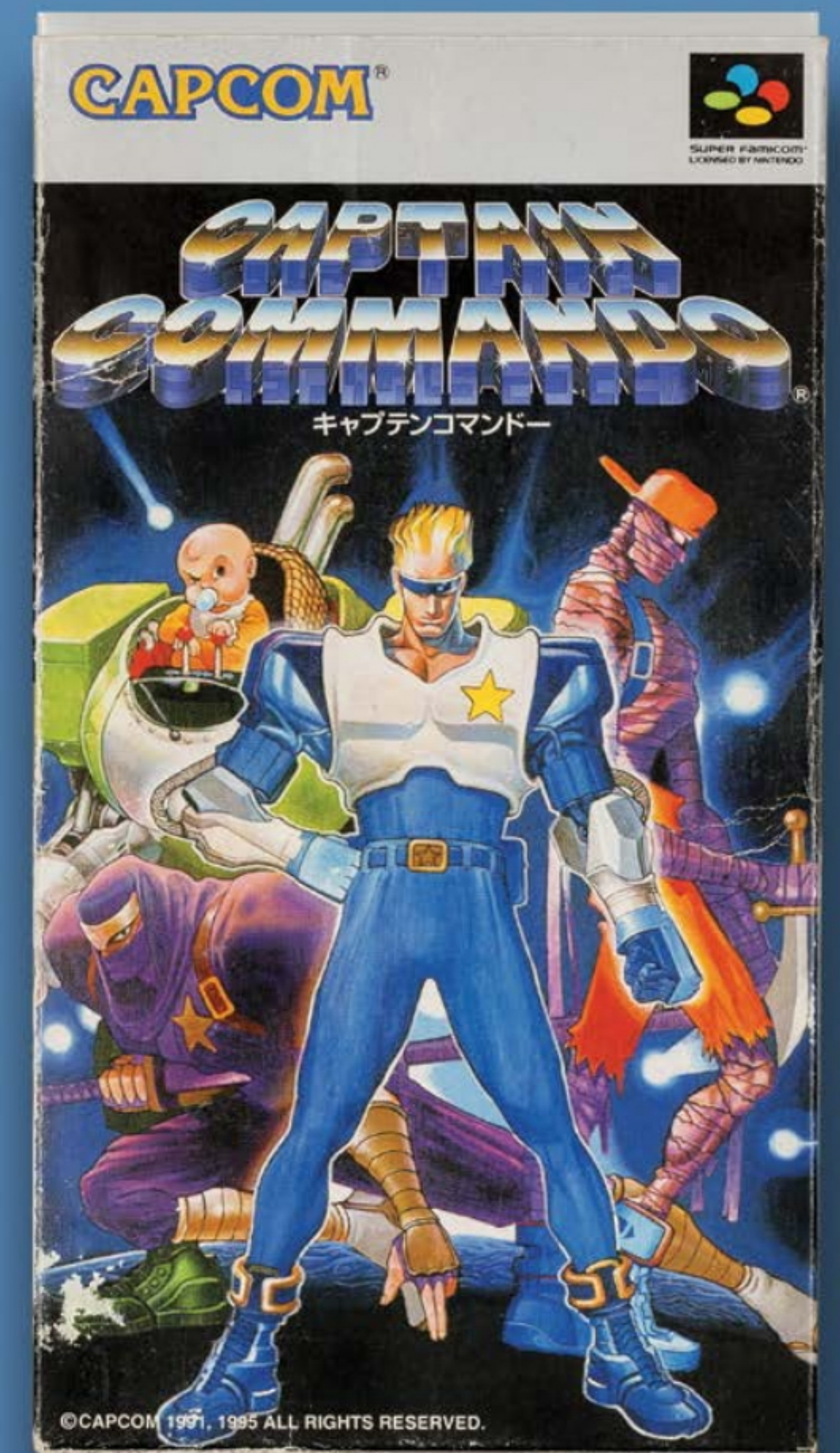
Bushi features box art by Ken Sugimori, Pokémon character designer and fellow member of Game Freak. His distinctive style can be seen in the depictions of Jin and his sidekick Wokū, although its simplistic design doesn't give much away about the game's fantastic content. Bushi also serves as an insight into the creative progress that Game Freak was undergoing following Pokémon Red and Blue for the Game Boy, games that would lead to a cultural phenomenon several years later.

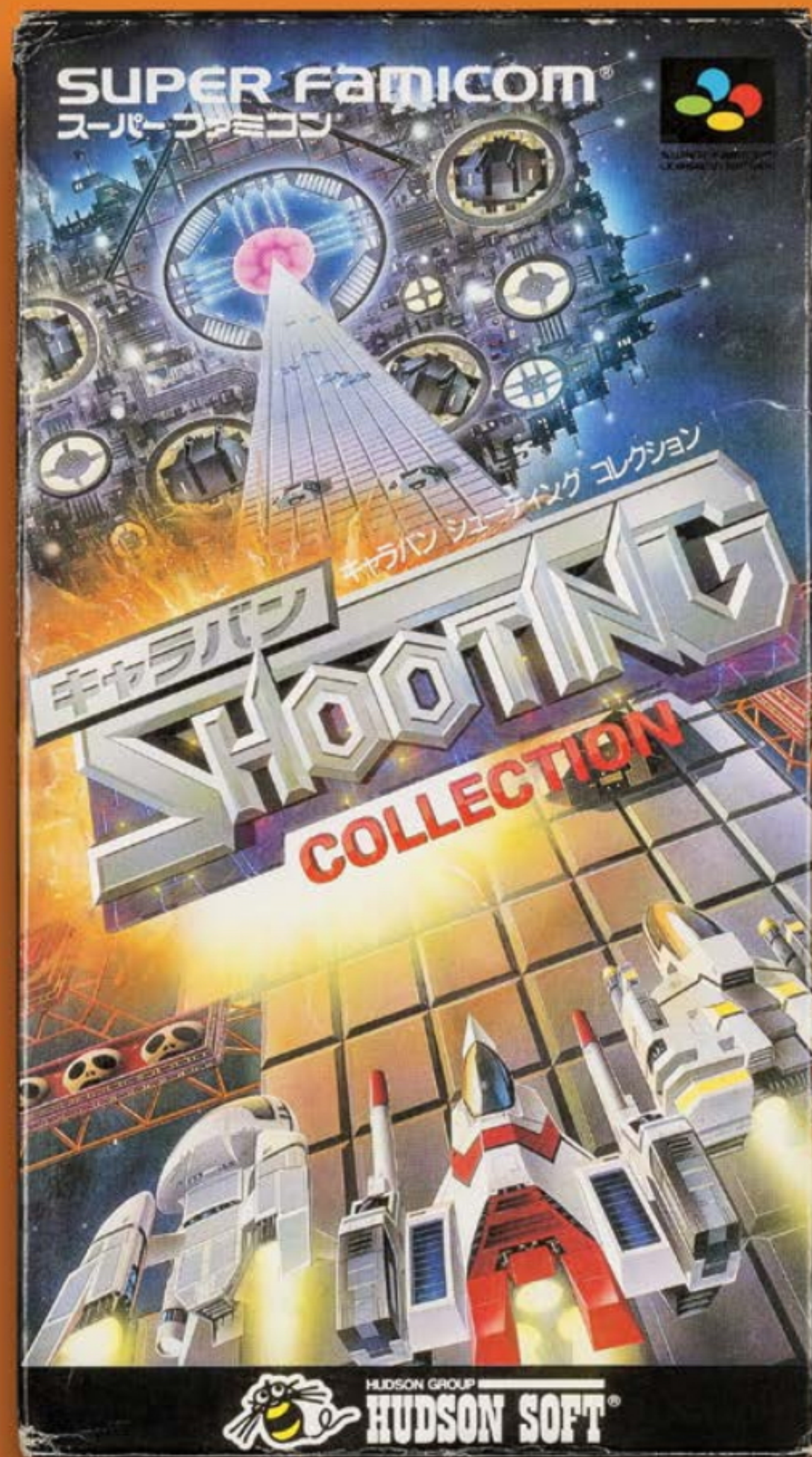
CAPTAIN COMMANDO

キャプテンコマンドー
CAPCOM (1995)
GENRE SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

The year is 2026. Metro City's crime rate has reached breaking point and the city is in chaos. Only Captain Commando and his three faithful Commando Companions can protect the Earth and the rest of the Galaxy from a gang of super-powered criminals, led by the alien crime lord Genocide. You can play as alien mummy Jennety, ninja master Sho, baby commando Hoover, or the titular Captain Commando. This arcade-style scrolling fighter from Capcom takes Final Fight's setting, Metro City, and throws it into a futuristic sci-fi scenario, complete with comic-book-styled aesthetics and whacky character design.

Captain Commando was Capcom's homage to classic American sci-fi comics and television shows. The artwork by illustrator Akira Yasuda is taken from the original Japanese flyer, created to promote the arcade version. The American sci-fi artist Frank R. Paul's work was an influence on the visual style developed for the game. Yasuda's cover illustration and unique character design helped to elevate the title to iconic status among the Capcom community and fans of the beat 'em up genre.





CARAVAN SHOOTING COLLECTION

ブランドイッシュ
HUDSON SOFT (1995)
GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

Caravan Shooting Collection contains some of Hudson Soft's greatest 8-bit era shooters from the 1980s, with Famicom remixes of Star Force, Star Soldier and Hector 87 combined in one cart. The title of the game derives from the now legendary Caravan festivals of the '80s – Hudson's own touring competitions for fans to achieve their greatest high scores and to play against the event's host and then-executive of Hudson, Toshiyuki Takahashi (also the star of the Adventure Island games). The events lasted throughout the '80s and '90s and still remain a huge influence on Japanese shoot 'em up culture, with several independent events and competitions taking place that pay tribute to the days of the Caravan festivals.

The artwork combines elements from each of the Hudson games: starships from all three titles are positioned at the bottom of the illustration as they race towards a huge mother ship, taken from the boss battle of Hector 87's first stage. This softened, airbrushed style evokes a 1980's video game feel, with its neon colouring and angular, Western-styled visuals.

CHOPLIFTER III

チョップリフターIII
BEAM SOFTWARE / VICTOR (1994)
GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

Dan Gorlin's 1982 classic is given a revamp for the 16-bit generation with Australian-based developers Beam Software bringing the series to the Super Nintendo. Choplifter III continues on from its predecessors by using the same play mechanics from the previous two games, although the original Hawk Z helicopter from the first game is now revamped with a model based on the Boeing AH-64 Apache gunship. Players fly deep into opposition territory to rescue hostages while holding back enemy forces. Once the hostages are on board, the player must return to the Allied Landing Zone, drop off their passengers, then head back out to repeat the process. Each level consists of a set number of hostages to rescue.

Dan Gorlin originally hired American illustrator Marc Ericksen to illustrate the first game, with five alternate covers created for various systems. However, the Japanese versions of Choplifter use different artists who tend to have a completely unique visual style from their Western counterparts. The original Super Nintendo artwork is replaced with a detailed action scene that's more reminiscent of Erickson's original '80s artwork. In a scene redolent of a pulp fiction novel, two civilians are placed at the centre of the illustration surrounded by explosions, enemy aircraft and swirling smoke, providing a sense of tension and danger. It's a stylish and memorable design reminiscent of 1980's arcade flyer art.



CHRONO TRIGGER

クロノ・トリガー
SQUARE (1995)
GENRE RPG



Chrono Trigger takes place in a world familiar to Earth, with eras such as the prehistoric age, in which primitive humans and dinosaurs share the earth; the Middle Ages, replete with knights, monsters, and magic; and the post-apocalyptic future, where destitute humans and sentient robots struggle to survive. The characters frequently travel through time to obtain allies, gather equipment and discover information to help them in their quest. The party also gains access to the End of Time (represented as year ∞), which serves as a hub to travel back to other time periods. The group eventually acquires a time machine vehicle known as the Wings of Time and nicknamed 'Epoch'. The vehicle is capable of travelling between any time period without first having to journey to the End of Time.

This classy cover art takes a selection of Akira Toriyama's character designs and places them against a white backdrop, making Chrono Trigger look very much like one of Squaresoft's Final Fantasy covers. Unlike Amano's chibi-style characters however, Toriyama adopts his trademark Dragon Ball Z illustration style, breathing life and personality into his miniature creations. Frog's suspicious gaze, Ayla's sassy hand-on-hip pose, Lucca's confused look, Robo's open-armed friendly gesture, Marle's defiant stance and the smirk and raised eyebrow of Crono make the box a deceptively detailed piece of work that tells us more about the characters than do the opening scenes of the game.

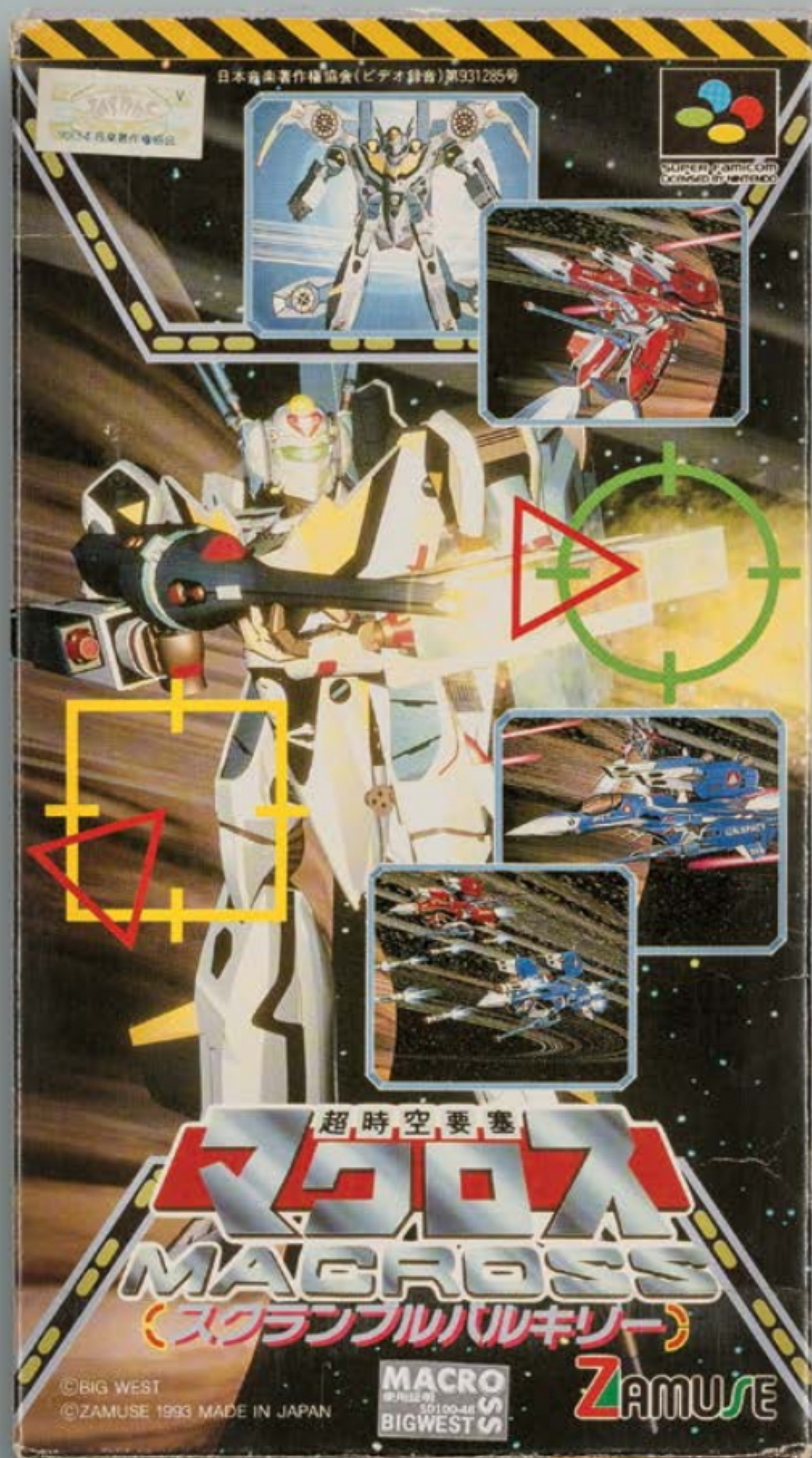
CHŌ ANIKI: BAKURETSU RANTŌ HEN

超兄貴 ~爆烈乱闘篇
NCS CORP / MASAYA (1995)
GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

Translated as 'Super Big Brother: Exploding Brawl', this third game from the cult series is a departure from the previous vertical shooting Chō Aniki games and instead adopts a one-on-one fighting format. Despite the change in genre, all of Chō Aniki's characters return, heroes and villains alike. Playable characters include: Idatein, a spikey-haired warrior who uses a variety of attacks with his body; Benten, who in this game is flanked by two cherubs that transform into mini-hunks; Sabu, a pagoda-shaped ship with an Elvis Presley-looking figurehead; Mami 19, a combination of a girl and a battleship transporting three naked, frolicking men, and many more weird and wonderful characters.

This cover painting by Matsuno Koyo depicts Samson (or his twin, Adon) flying through space with a giant Uminin behind him and a little portrait of Idatein floating in between. This bizarre design fits well with what is a surreal and tongue-in-cheek game. Masaya took the 'baka-ge' (idiot game) genre to new heights with the Chō Aniki series; its bizarre blend of camp and the surreal, mixed with solid game design, created a cult-like following of fans, leading to several games across many systems.





CHŌJIKU YŌSAI MACROSS – SCRAMBLED VALKYRIE

超時空要塞マクロス スクランブルバルキリー
WINKYSOFT / ZAMUSE (1993)
GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

This horizontal shooter is based on the long-running Macross franchise. The game follows the war between the Earth's U.N. Spacy (a portmanteau of Space and Navy) and the alien Zentraedi, and adheres to the storyline of the first series of the 1984 anime, Macross: Do You Remember Love? Players choose from three pilots – Max, Hikaru and Millia – and each has their own Valkyrie, capable of transforming into three different ships and altering the player's attack mode. These consist of Fighter (standard, three way horizontal fire), Gerwalk (diagonal gunfire) and Battroid (biped jet-powered mech with missiles). Scrambled Valkyrie is regarded as one of the finest shooters for the console and a high point in the history of Macross video game adaptations.

This pilot's-eye-view features a 3D render of Hikaru Ichijyo's Valkyrie: VF1SOL-S in Battroid mode set against a ringed planet. Several smaller images surround the graphic, revealing the different attack modes of the ship, plus some incongruously garish targeting reticules. The official Macross logo is recreated beneath with a brushed metal effect. The 3D render may look crude by today's standards but that doesn't detract from what is a fabulous game and a highly collectible title for shoot 'em up fans and Macross collectors alike.

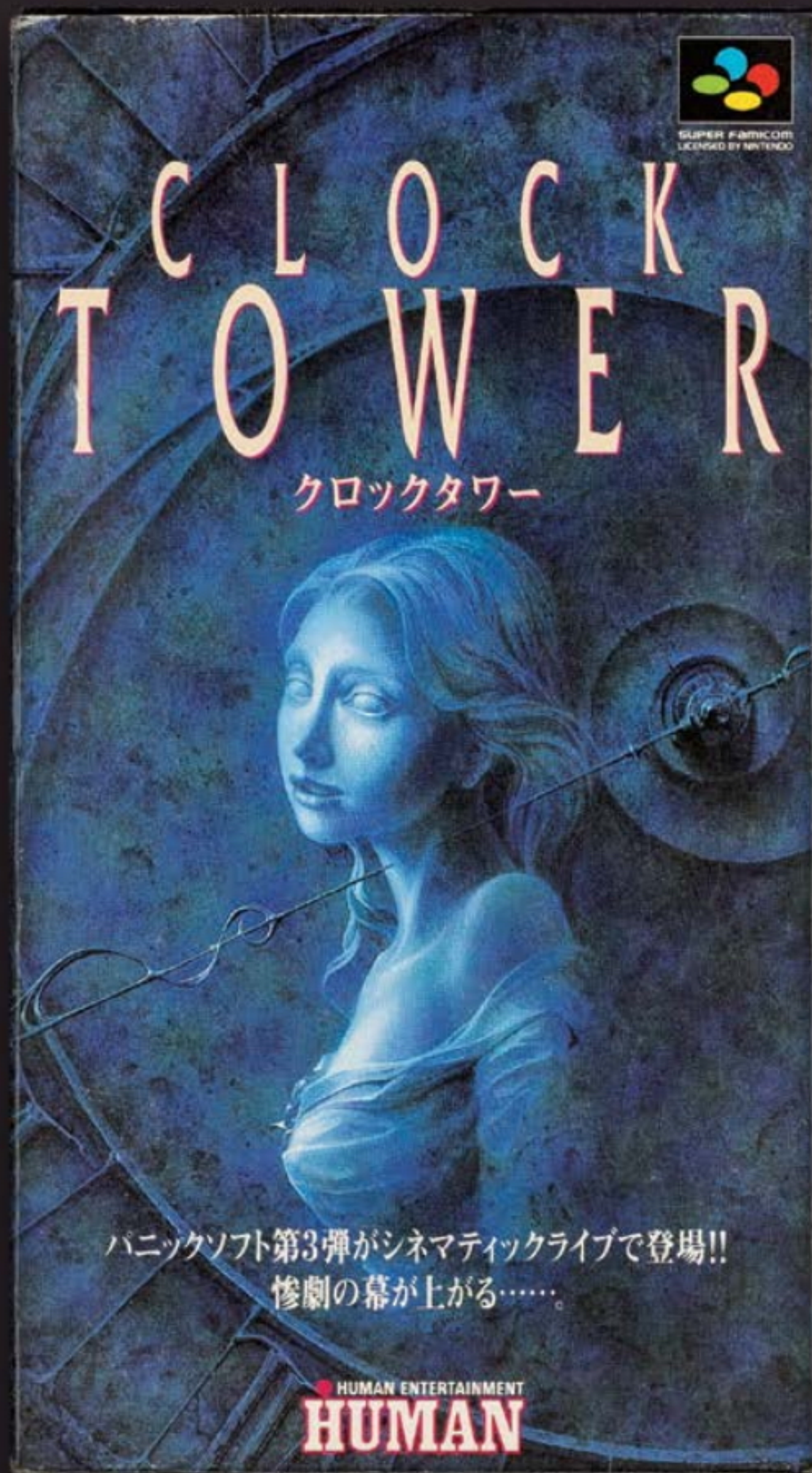
CHOHMAKAIMURA

超魔界村
CAPCOM (1991)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

Known as Chohmakaimura (Ultra Demon World Village) in Japan, this side-scrolling platformer by Capcom is better known in its Western guise as Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts. A Super Famicom exclusive in the Makaimura series it stars Arthur, a knight who must once again rescue Princess Guinevere from the undead. The Demon Emperor Samael has kidnapped the Princess in order to obtain the whereabouts of the Goddess' bracelet, the only artefact that is capable of destroying him. Arthur must recover the bracelet in order to defeat his nemesis.

The illustrator combines manga themes with a Western comic book style, creating a cover that's both ghoulish and light-hearted in tone. Arthur leaps forward, lance in hand and steely determination in his eye, as countless foes and end-of-level bosses tower over him in an illustration that hints at the ferocious challenge awaiting the player.





CLOCK TOWER

クロックタワー

HUMAN ENTERTAINMENT (1995)

GENRE: SURVIVAL HORROR

In Clock Tower you play as Jennifer Simpson, a Norwegian orphan who, along with some of her fellow orphans, are adopted into the mysterious Barrows family. Having arrived at the Barrows mansion and finding no-one to greet them, Jennifer and her friends discover that something evil resides in the empty house. Jennifer must learn the secrets of the family estate and escape the game's antagonist, the demonic Scissorman (nine-year-old Bobby Barrows). The game's characters and storyline are heavily inspired by Dario Argento's film, Phenomena, and Scissorman takes some inspiration from the villain in Tony Maylam's 1981 film The Burning. The title is also notable for having nine different endings achieved through varying degrees of success.

Clock Tower's eerie atmosphere is perfectly captured in this dark Gothic artwork. In the game a steady building of tension, interspersed with moments of shock and horror, keep the player on the edge of their seat. On the cover, Jennifer is portrayed both metaphorically and literally as petrified – frozen in fear like a statue. The hand of the clock piercing Jennifer's neck is a subtly disturbing image and a reminder that one of her biggest enemies is time itself.

CONTRA SPIRITS

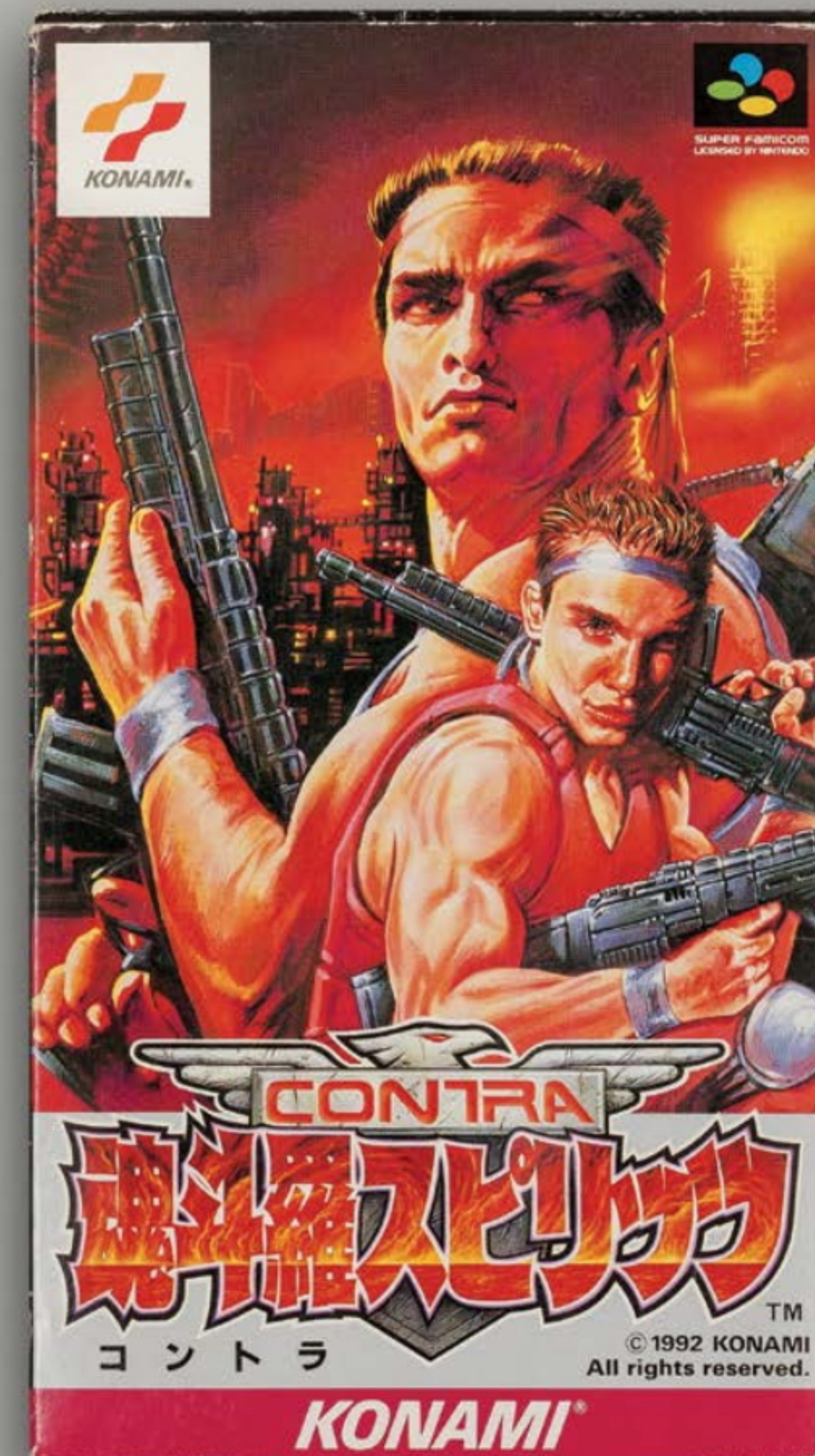
魂斗羅スピリッツ

KONAMI (1992)

GENRE: SCROLLING COMBAT

Contra Sprits takes place in the year 2636 and continues on from the storyline of the previous instalments for the Famicom. The alien invaders that were defeated during the previous games have returned and launched a full-scale attack against mankind on Earth, sparking the 'Alien Wars'. It's down to Bill and Lance to once again save the day by obliterating the enemy using every weapon at their disposal and killing their leader, Emperor Demon Java (referred to as 'Red Falcon' in the West).

This cover painting takes Bill's character as the central focus and uses a still of Arnold Schwarzenegger from the film Raw Deal as its inspiration. The characters are set against a heavily-saturated industrialised backdrop, all of which makes for a striking box design and cinematic feel that accurately depicts the game's palette and violent themes. The American version contained an alternative and less plagiaristic box illustration, but for the European release the title of the game was deemed too political and militant. Contra Spirits was renamed to Super Probotector – a more peaceful ('protector') and positive-sounding name. The human protagonists were also replaced with robots, a move made by Konami to reduce the violent aspect of the game and to guarantee a release in Germany. The Super Famicom box is the only version that contains the original cover art.





COSMO POLICE GALIVAN II: ARROW OF JUSTICE

コスモポリスギャリバンII
NICHIBUTSU (1993)
GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

The intergalactic crime organisation Margarite has returned but this time its target is Earth. The Space Police respond by assembling an elite task force – 'The Arrow of Justice' – led by Police Sheriff Galivan and accompanied by Detective Queen Bee and cyborg warrior Metal Hawk. The Cosmo Police must fight the Margarite forces, led by Guro Ubusu, and wipe them out.

The plot and characters from Cosmo Police Galivan pay homage to the Japanese television show, Space Sheriff Gavan – a 'tokusatsu' (special effects-heavy) series that follows the adventures of a space police force defending Earth and other planets from alien criminals. Despite its Japanese origins, Galivan's box bears more of a resemblance to Western comic book art than its main source of inspiration. This may have been a decision by Nichibutsu to ensure that some discrepancies were made between the television show and the game. Film director Paul Verhoeven and writer Edward Neumeier have both cited Police Sheriff Gavan as an inspiration behind the design of RoboCop.

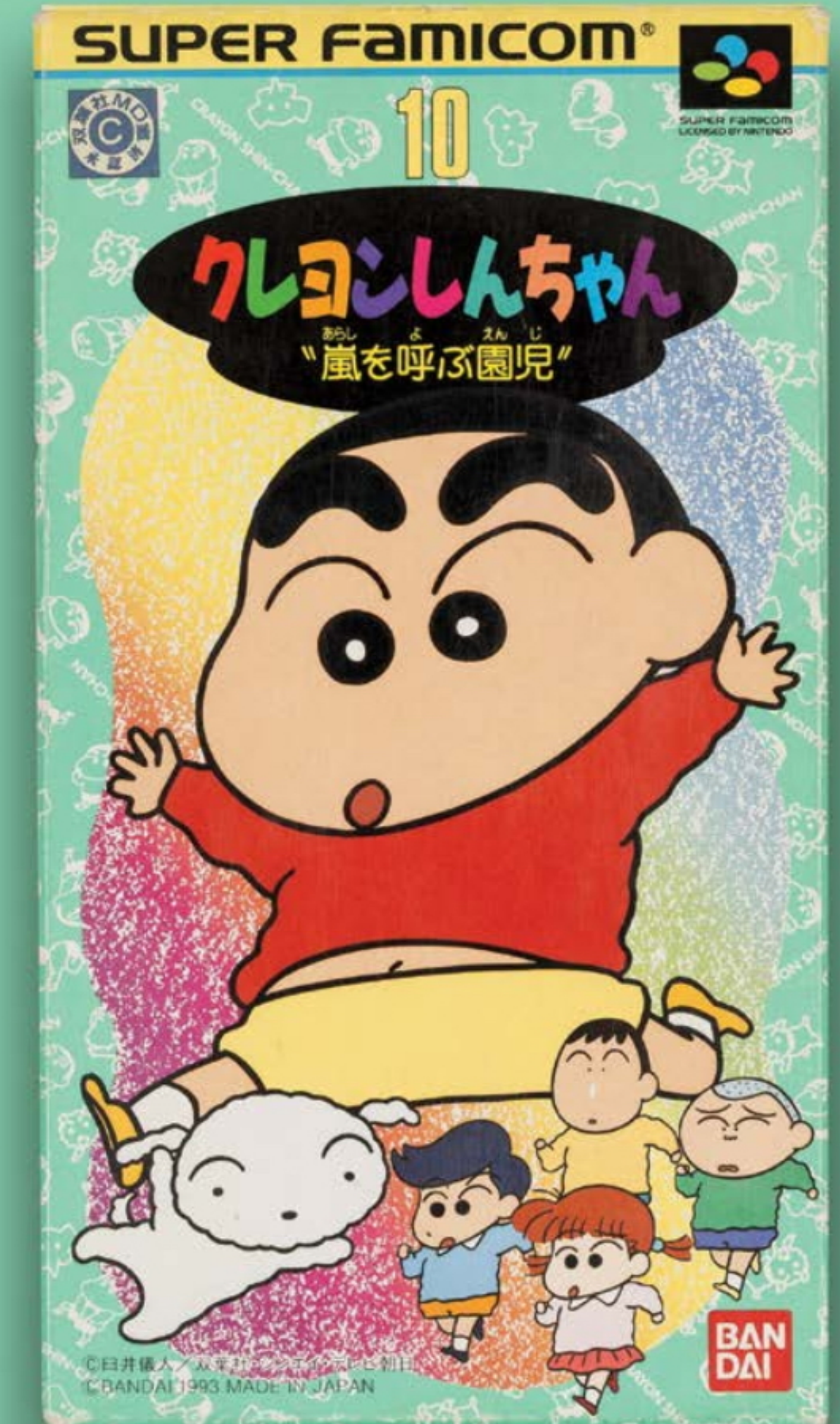
CRAYON SHIN-CHAN

ARASHI WO YOBU ENJI

クレヨンしんちゃん “嵐を呼ぶ園児”
BANDAI (1993)
GENRE: PLATFORM ADVENTURE

Crayon Shin-Chan – the Kid who Causes a Storm – follows the adventures of five-year-old Shinnosuke 'Shin' Nohara as he explores his neighbourhood of Kasukabe while getting up to mischief involving his parents, baby sister, dog, neighbours and friends. Shin must speak with each of his neighbours to discover the whereabouts of objects he needs to gain access to new areas, while avoiding his school friends in the street. This action-adventure game is based on the comedy manga and anime series of the same name.

Crayon Shin-Chan's colourful cover features an illustration by its creator, Yoshito Usui. His iconic art style is synonymous with the series and the image is a clear indicator of the humour and charm to be discovered within the game. The animated series of Shin-Chan enjoyed wide success, with many countries broadcasting it in several languages.





CYBORG 009

サイボーグ009
INTERBEC (1994)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

The evil Black Ghost organisation has returned! After facing defeat from its own creations, Black Ghost has risen from the ashes, and only the Cyborg 009 team can stop them. This group of cybernetic super humans were once kidnapped by Black Ghost and subjected to human experiments, resulting in nine cyborgs, each with their own unique abilities. The nine must band together once more to destroy their enemy, and bring peace to the world.

Shotaro Ishinomori's manga classic from 1964 is one of Japan's most beloved series. From its comic book beginnings, Cyborg 009 has been serialised in television shows, animated films, toys and audio dramas over the course of 50 years, and still remains a popular franchise. The cover design features Ishinomori's art style from the late '70s, showing various characters with Cyborg 009 leader, Joe Shimamura, as the central figure. This striking packaging makes use of vintage art and the iconic '009' logo, and the in-game graphics also draw inspiration from this period.

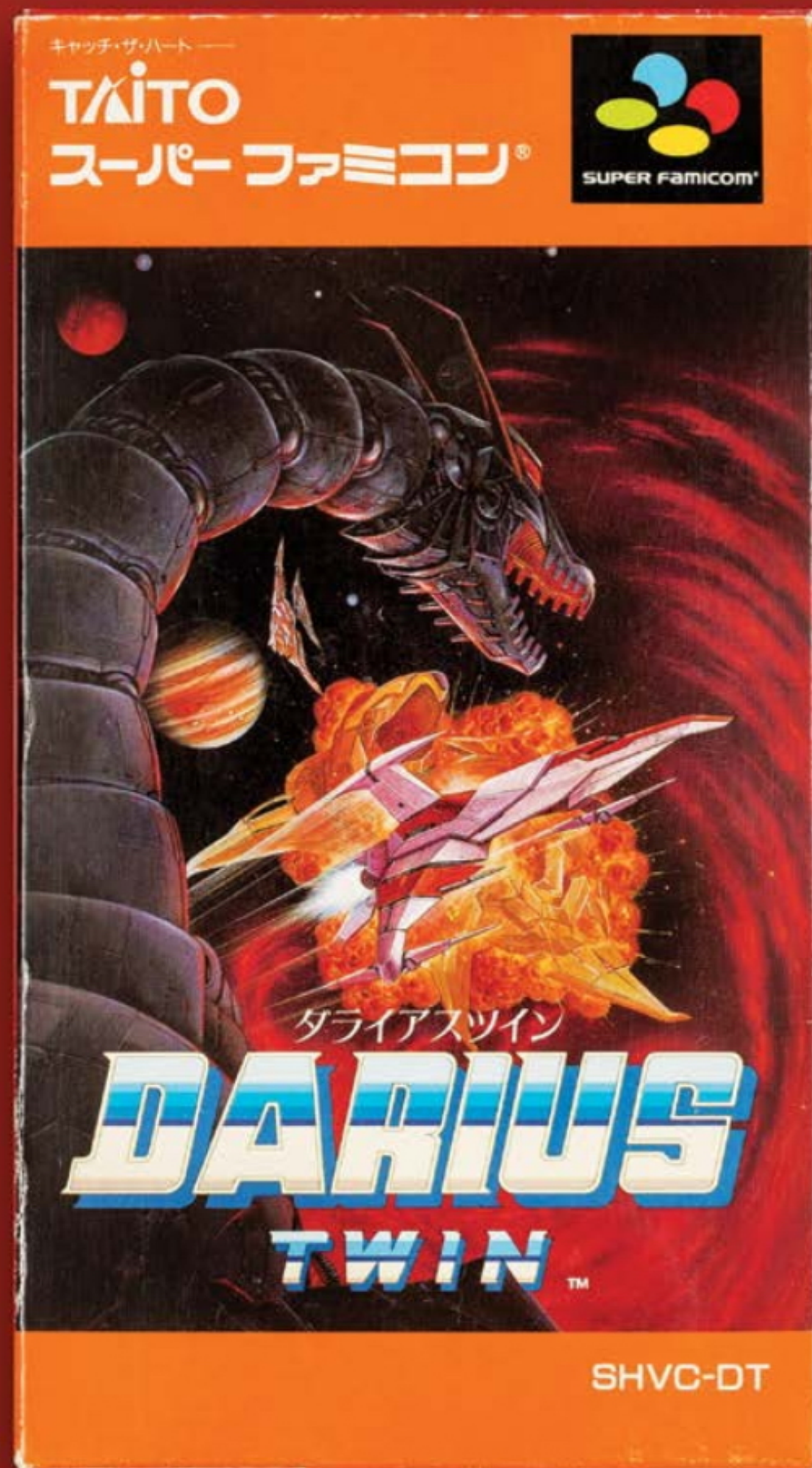
DARIUS FORCE

ダライアスフォース
TAITO (1993)
GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

Taito's long-running arcade and home console series makes its second appearance on the Super Famicom with another exclusive for the system, Darius Force. Centuries have passed since the defeat of the Belser Empire with peace seemingly having returned to the galaxy. However, the Belser have reappeared with a military fleet of unimaginable size, and so the Silver Hawk star ships are deployed to counter the attack, with the aim of preventing a full-scale interplanetary invasion. Darius Force is the first game in the series to offer a selection of three different playable Silver Hawks, including the Red Hawk (FRSA-6351), a new ship introduced exclusively for Darius Force.

The Darius series is well known for stylish and memorable artwork and Darius Force is no exception. An aerial dogfight is depicted between a Silver Hawk and a Belser enemy craft. Darius Force continues with the series' fish and crustacean-styled enemy design and this depiction of a Belser ship flowing vertically from the logo makes perfect use of the box proportions. The composition takes full advantage of the available space and subtly balances logo design with visual content. The electrically charged blue backdrop brings the title design into focus while similar hues of red are stylishly placed in the small details of both craft.





DARIUS TWIN

ダライアスツイン
TAITO (1991)
GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

Darius Twin was the first instalment in the series not to be originally designed for the arcades, and takes place thousands of years after the original battle of Darius. Having been fought back to the edges of the Galaxy, the Belser Empire has now recovered from its losses and launches another attempt to invade planet Darius. Inspired by the legends of Proco and Tiat – the pilots in the first Darius game – two of the Federation's best pilots now ready their spacecraft for the long galactic battle that awaits them. This good-looking shooter is notable for having branching pathways and multiple endings.

The early series of Darius games never failed to impress with their high standard of box art. With its lava-red cover art and towering enemy ship, Darius Twin's packaging immediately sets the tone for what is an action-packed explosion-fest. The arcing flames in the backdrop cleverly spiral into the centre of the box, leading the eye towards the Silver Hawk – neatly framed by an explosion – and bringing balance to the contrasting cool blue logo. The dragon-like enemy ship curves around the box, framing the action and bringing an additional element of perspective to the design.

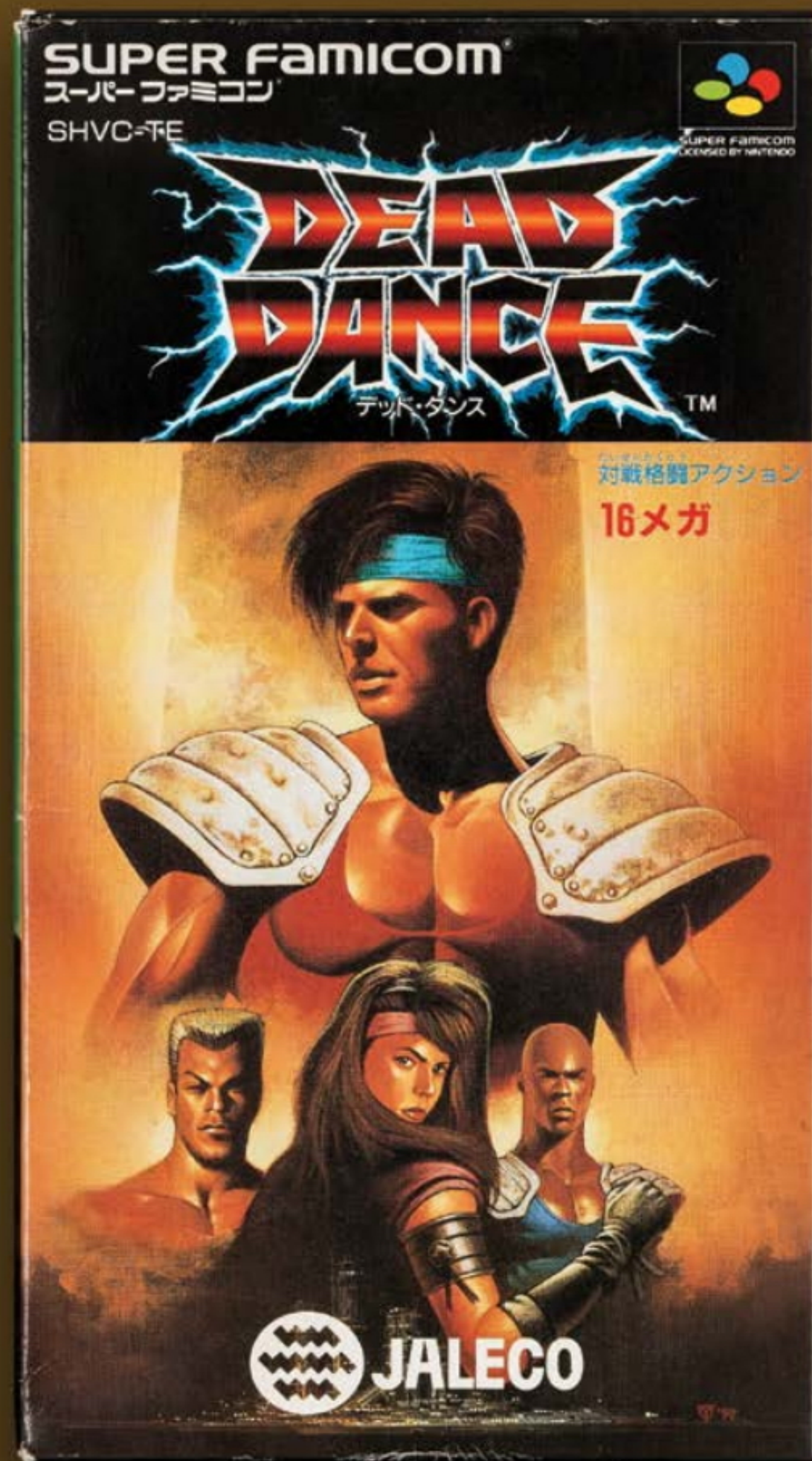
DARK HALF

ダークハーフ
WESTONE / ENIX (1996)
GENRE: RPG



In Dark Half we play as two opposing characters, Falco and Rukyu, providing two alternate perspectives from a central plot. The demon King Rukyu has awakened and seeks out his nemesis, the heroic god Roda, who once tried to seal him in eternal darkness. After taking a mortal host, Rukyu assembles an army of monsters and prepares to find and kill Roda. Only Falco, a young swordsman who is the embodiment of Roda, can defeat him. What follows is an unusual and engrossing RPG, with some clever game mechanics and sharp writing.

As its title suggests, this Japan-exclusive release from Enix is one of the Super Famicom's darkest games in content. It features fantastic pastel work, which brings an additional layer of depth and gravitas to the game's characters and storyline. Its sinister and graphic depiction sets a mature tone that's unique for the Super Famicom and would almost certainly not have met with approval when securing an official release in the West.



DEAD DANCE

デッド・ダンス
JALECO (1993)
GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

Street Fighter II-inspired beat 'em up Dead Dance (known as Tuff E Nuff outside Japan) is set in a post-apocalyptic Earth in the year AD 2151. In a barren world dominated by the survival of the strongest, a man named Jado, who calls himself 'The Fighting King', rules supreme. As a show of strength he builds a huge tower guarded by his best warriors. Many people venture to the tower to try and defeat the so-called king, but none return. The story kicks off when the four greatest fighters – Syoh, Zazi, Kotono and Vortz – are called to a tournament in which they must fight Jado's henchmen for a chance to take on and defeat Jado. Sadly, the plot cut-scenes of the Story Mode and the final epilogue were excluded from the North American and European versions.

Dead Dance's cover features Zazi, Kotono and Vortz with Syoh taking centre stage. The illustration was originally created for a feature in the British games magazine, Computer & Video Games. Jaleco chose to use the artwork for its Japanese and European versions, with a different and vastly inferior design commissioned for the American release. To further the Western visual style of the packaging, Jaleco has chosen to display the game's logo in English, with its Japanese translation positioned underneath in a smaller typeface.

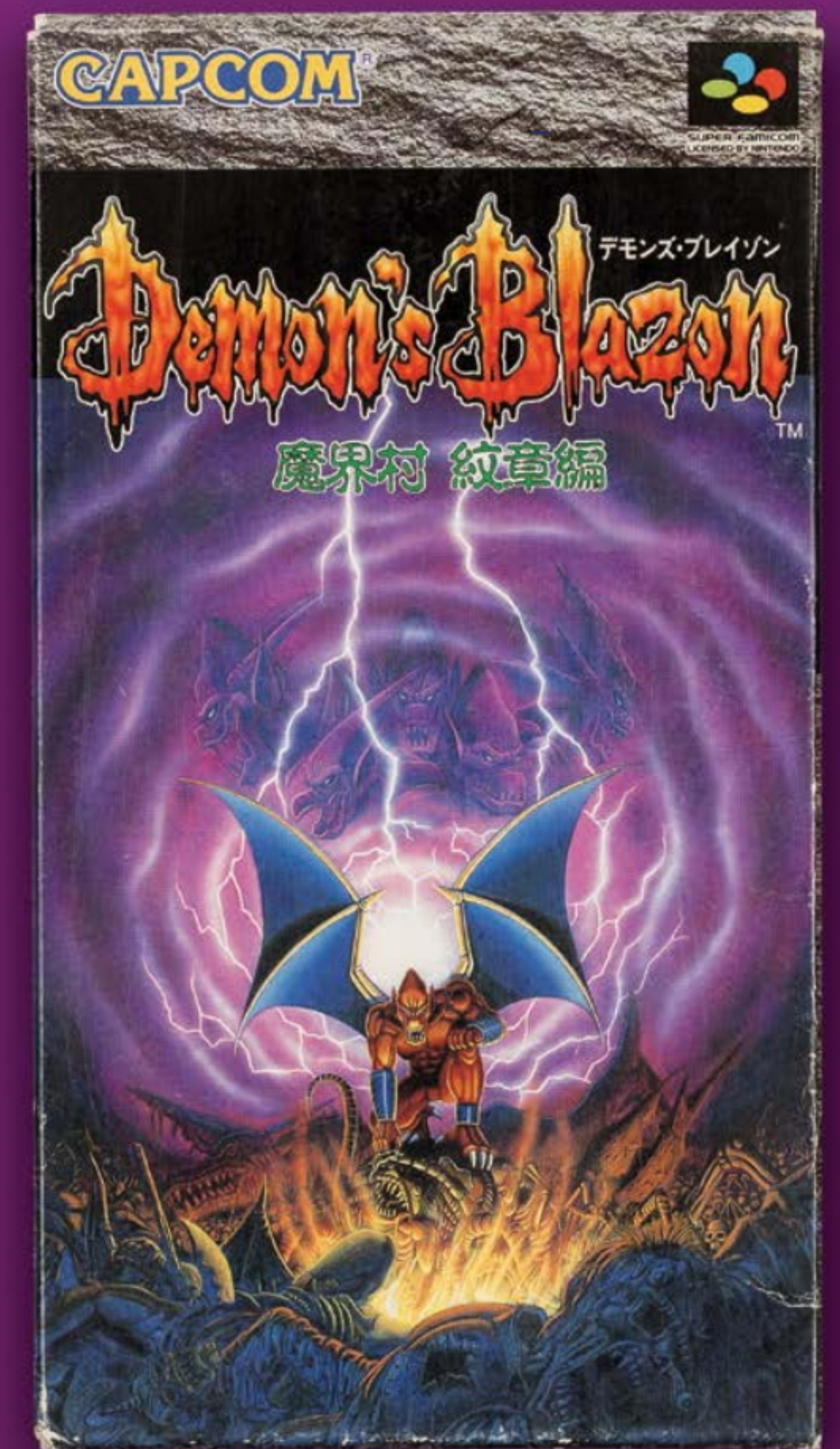
DEMON'S BLAZON:

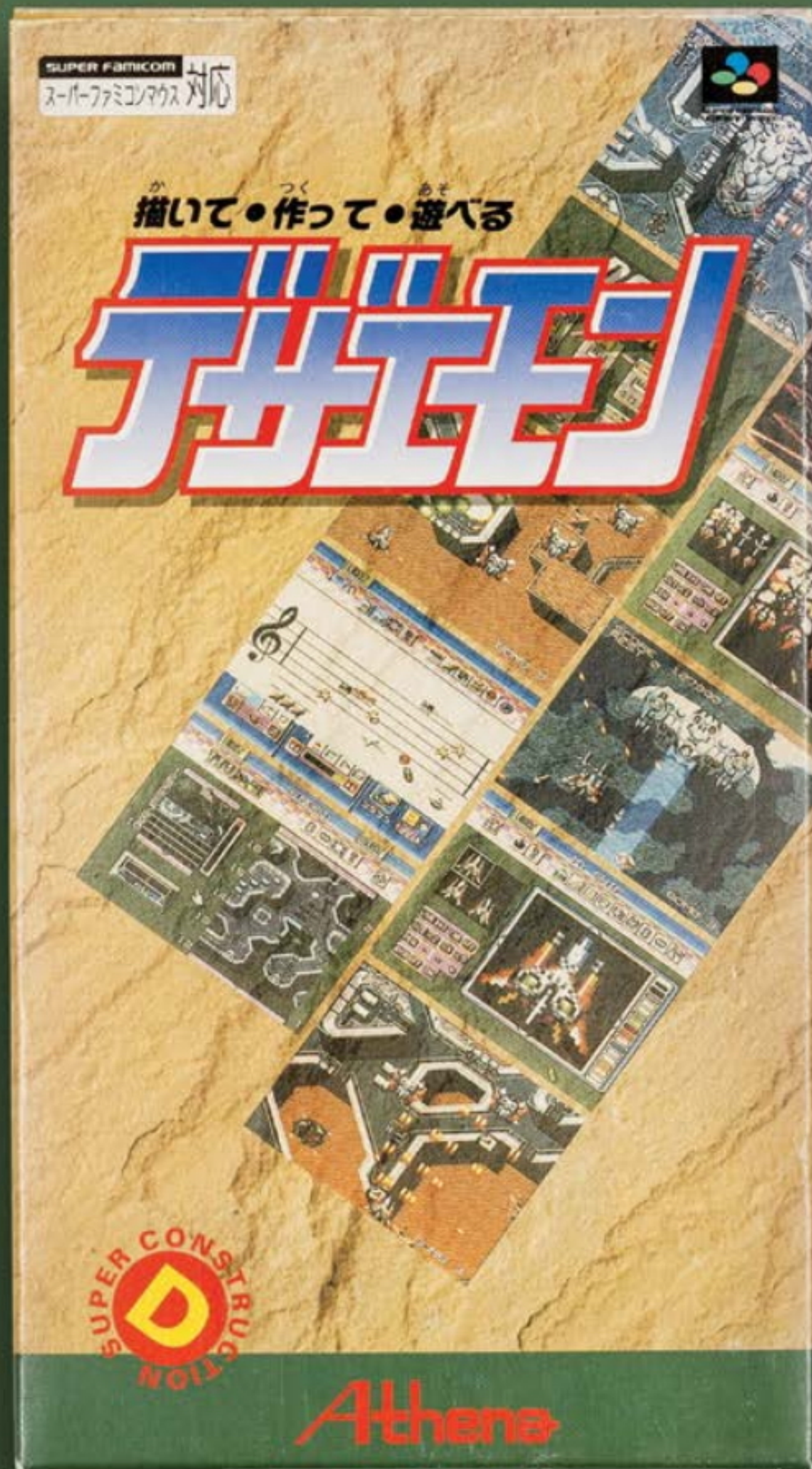
MAKAIMURA MONSHŌ HEN

デモンズ・ブレイゾン 魔界村 紋章編
CAPCOM (1994)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

Six magical crests have fallen from the heavens into the demon realm. These crests carry great powers and can control the forces of the elements of nature, time and heaven. A great war has waged over the ownership of the crests but after years of bloodshed, one demon claimed them for himself, the Red Arremer, Firebrand (a Red Arremer is the first boss and mascot of the Ghosts 'n Goblins series). However, before Firebrand could get to safety, he was attacked by the Arch Demon, Phalanx. Sensing his defeat, Firebrand dropped the crests to the Earth below so that Phalanx could not claim them for himself. The player controls Firebrand on a quest to recover the crests and defeat Phalanx.

Demon's Blazon's box art is significantly more graphic and darker in tone than its Western counterpart. Firebrand's original character design from Ghosts 'n Goblins is faithfully restored and the artist places him at the centre of the action. Bodies lay strewn in the foreground, while Firebrand sits on the corpses of his foes, contemplating the battle ahead. Notable enemies are depicted in the swirling mystical background, as dramatic forked lightning punctuates the artwork. The use of purples and blues evoke an ominous sense of the supernatural, and perfectly builds expectations for what is a fantastic game.





DEZAEMON

デザエモン

ATHENA (1994)

GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP / GAME CREATION

This Japanese cult classic from Athena is a direct follow-up to the original Dezaemon, released for the Famicom in 1991. What makes Dezaemon different from every other blaster is that it provides the player with all the tools to create and design their very own vertical shoot 'em up. Players can design ships, frames of animation, backgrounds and even compose music for the game with its built-in sequencer. Dezaemon's fervent fan-base quickly grew into a creative community, with players sharing their own creations on various websites, databases and video sites for years following the game's release and well into the early 2000s.

Designing promotional artwork for a game that has no flagship characters, music or storyline must have proven tricky for Athena's staff. However, what makes for an underwhelming presentation does at least reveal what the game is capable of in the form of little screenshots set against a sandstone backdrop. Dezaemon is a real hidden gem in the Super Famicom's roster, boasting an incredible and in-depth game creation tool.

DISNEY'S ALADDIN

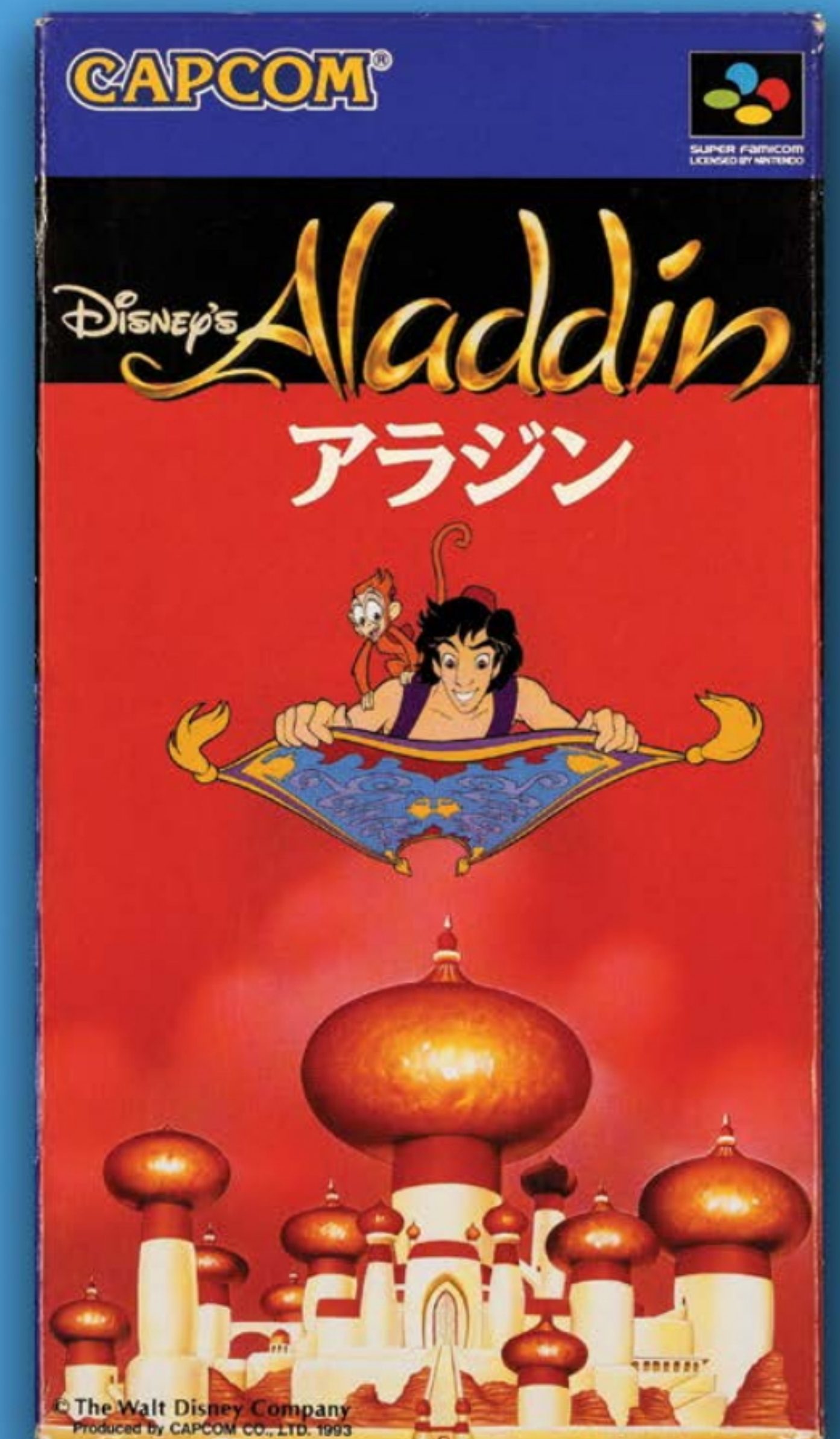
アラジン

CAPCOM (1993)

GENRE: PLATFORM

Aladdin, a common thief, is the only person who can enter the Cave of Wonders and retrieve a magical lamp for the dark Vizier Jafar. Aladdin becomes trapped in the cave and accidentally discovers the resident of the lamp, a genie, who grants him magical wishes to become a prince and impress his beloved Princess Jasmine. The game is based on the 1993 Disney animated film of the same name.

The Super Famicom release is the only version to have the genie character omitted from the cover. According to designer Shinji Mikami, Disney had requested to have Robin Williams' character removed. This may have been due to a dispute at the time between Robin Williams and Disney over the use of his character and voice to promote products without his consent.





DONALD DUCK NO MAHŌ NO BŌSHI

ドナルドダックの魔法のぼうし
SAKATA SAS / EPOCH (1995)
GENRE: PLATFORM ADVENTURE

With Daisy Duck's birthday approaching, Donald is tasked with buying his girl a new hat, which he can't afford. Donald decides to take on various jobs – paper boy, window cleaner, canary fetcher and game show entrant – in order to save up some cash. But by the time Donald has earned enough money (which involves the player performing each task as an introduction to the game), he discovers that the hat store has sold it. A mysterious wizard appears and offers to help Donald find the hat. In return, Donald must help the wizard clear his castle of ghosts, and so the game proper begins. Unusually, additional game content could be unlocked by scanning barcodes with the Super Famicom's 'Barcode Battler II' interface.

Donald Duck's Magical Hat features classic Disney-styled artwork, the vibrant and detailed imagery matching the game's stunning character and environment design. The central characters, Donald, Daisy and Pete, are presented on the box, along with a small but charming little fire sprite from the game. The typography is fittingly stylised with a classic Japanese Disney treatment.

DOOM

ドゥーム
IMAGINEER / ID SOFTWARE /
WILLIAMS (1996)
GENRE: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

This groundbreaking first-person shooter arrived three years after the MS-DOS original. We play as an unnamed marine who, after assaulting his commanding officer, is posted to a military base on Mars. However, this marine base acts as security for the Union Aerospace Corporation, a multi-planetary conglomerate which is performing classified experiments with teleportation by creating portals between the moons of Mars, Deimos and Phobos. After arriving on Mars and taking up his post as a security guard, the systems on Phobos malfunction, Deimos disappears entirely, and evil beings start emerging from the portal, killing everything in their path. And so it's down to our Space Marine to save the day.

This hastily handled Japanese port features the artwork used for the landscape Super Nintendo packaging. But as the ratio doesn't fit the box, the artwork has been rotated to a 45-degree angle and cropped on one side, resulting in much of the box being left black. However, the rotated imagery is more in line with the original, unedited art by Don Ivan Punchatz, with the central character standing upright. Doom's Japanese sales were very low compared with Europe and North America's figures. Military-themed first-person shooters continue to be, on the whole, ignored by Japanese gaming culture and remain a phenomenon exclusive to the West.





DOREMI FANTASY: MILON NO DOKIDOKI DAIBŌKEN

ドレミファンタジー
ミロンのドキドキ大冒険

HUDSON SOFT (1996)
GENRE: PLATFORM

In this sequel to Hudson's 1988 game, Milon's Secret Castle, we play once again as the young boy Milon. In his latest adventure, he travels through a magical forest to rescue his friend, the fairy Alis, from an evil wizard named Amon who has stolen all of the music from the land. Milon must retrieve five magical instruments – flute, accordion, trumpet, ocarina and harp – as well as a powerful crystal in order to defeat Amon, rescue Alis and restore the music to his land.

This cult classic from Hudson delivers cover art that's bold, bright and rich with character. Its anime-like design is a marked improvement over the original 1988 Famicom character art, bringing more personality and charm to the lead character. The game's magical instruments float around Milon in little bubbles with his hometown orchestra playing in the background.

DRAGON BALL Z: SUPER BUTŌDEN

ドラゴンボールZ超武闘伝
TOSE SOFTWARE / BANDAI (1993)
GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

Dragon Ball Z: Super Fighting Story was the first Butōden instalment for the Super Famicom, a series created by game designer Toshihiro Suzuki. The game's stages are divided by a split-screen border, which reveals to players how close they are to their opponent. Combat can take place on the ground or in the air and playable characters include Goku, Vegeta, Android 20, Android 16, Piccolo, Frieza, Android 18 and Imperfect Cell.

The bold and stylish artwork for Dragon Ball Z Super Butōden is by celebrated Japanese manga and video game artist Akira Toriyama, the creator of Dragon Ball Z. Colours are used sparingly, with yellows and greens balanced across the typography and artwork, while red highlights complement the design and draw the eye around the image.





DRAGON QUEST I & II

ドラゴンクエストI・II
CHUN SOFT / ENIX (1993)
GENRE: RPG

Enix's epic 8-bit RPG series is ported to the Super Famicom, along with its sequel, boasting enhanced graphics, animation frames and music. In Dragon Quest I we play as an unnamed hero who's charged with slaying the Dragonlord, rescuing the kingdom of Alefgard's princess, Lora, and reclaiming the treasured Ball of Light. In Part II we play as the Prince of Lorasla, a descendant of the great Erdrick, in a story that takes place 100 years after its predecessor. Two additional characters are also introduced, the Prince of Samaltria and the Princess of Moonbroke (both pictured on the cover).

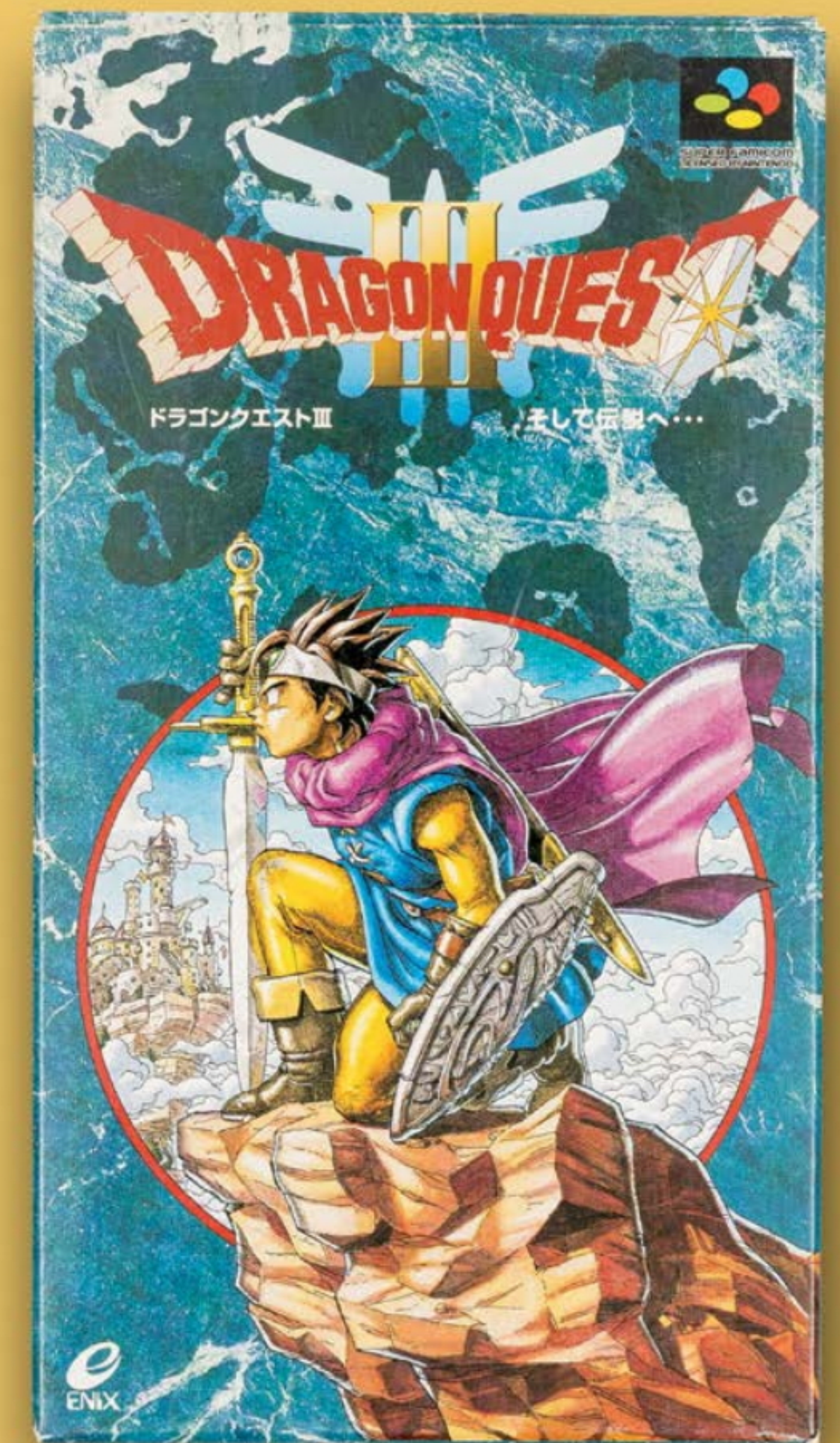
Akira Toriyama illustrated the entire series, with the game's creator, Yuji Hori, overseeing his work. With this design, Toriyama's cover art looks almost as if it could be a snapshot taken from a moment from within the game. It holds a storybook quality that lures you in to discover more. The game's lead characters, detail, setting and storyline are all referenced in a subtle but charming chibi-style illustration.

DRAGON QUEST III SOSHITE DENSETSU HE

ドラゴンクエストIII そして伝説へ…
HEART BEAT / ENIX (1996)
GENRE: RPG

The game begins on the morning of our hero's birthday. His father, the revered warrior Ortega, had disappeared many years previously and on this day our hero must fulfil his father's quest in defeating the archfiend Baramos. Music, animation and graphics are improved upon the original, with some additional features including new musical tracks and a personality statistic – a character attribute which alters depending on which books a party member reads during the adventure.

Toriyama's illustration has our hero looking purposely into the distance while he kneels precariously on a rocky outcrop. Baramos' mountaintop castle is framed behind him, enveloped in clouds. The marble backdrop and map elements hint toward classical RPG themes, while Toriyama's use of combining an image of the hero and his thoughts/sights makes great use of the limitations of the box's dimensions.





DRAGON QUEST V TENKŪ NO HANAYOME

ドラゴンクエストV 天空の花嫁
CHUNSOFT / ENIX (1992)
GENRE: RPG

Dragon Quest V: The Hand of the Heavenly Bride was the first Dragon Quest 16-bit revision to be released for the Super Famicom. This updated version makes use of the console's extended colour palette and sprites have been re-drawn to contain more detail. The game follows the life of a boy, beginning with his birth and quest to find his mother, to adulthood, marriage and children of his own. Dragon Quest V is regarded amongst many fans and its creator Yuji Horias the best in the series. It brings an emotional depth that is unmatched by its predecessors.

The cover art depicts our hero in his teenage years, with childhood friend Bianca and Sabre, his faithful feline companion. Toriyama chose to capture another moment in our hero's story on the cover of the instruction manual, which reveals a childhood scene. Our hero's father, Papas, watches over his son as he explores Santa Rosa. Toriyama's snapshot-like art serves as a clever tool that highlights key moments in our character's adventures without revealing any of the game's many plot twists.

DRAGON QUEST VI MABOROSHI NO DAICHI

ドラゴンクエストVI 幻の大地
HEART BEAT / ENIX (1995)
GENRE: RPG

Dragon Quest VI: Realms of Revelation is the first of the series to be developed by Heart Beat. For this sixth instalment, the game is vastly improved over its predecessors with enhanced graphics, music, animations and battle sequences. This resulted in a 32-megabit cartridge, a costly production for Enix which in 1995 had decided to slow development of new IP for the Super Famicom as games were already being developed for the N64. As with other Dragon Quest games, we play as the hero with a name of your choosing. The game begins with our heroes recovering from amnesia following a battle with the Demon King, Murdaw. The story continues with our character stumbling across a parallel world that's constructed of dreams from the inhabitants of the real world. A demonic threat to both realms begins and our hero and his band of warriors embarks on a quest to save both from the clutches of evil.

Toriyama's cover illustration features Milly and Carver as they accompany our hero by hitching a ride on a dragon. Murdaw is pictured in the background in ghostly blue and, as with previous covers, the action is seen to be bursting out of its frame.





EDO NO KIBA

エドノ牙

MICRO WORLD / TELNET JAPAN /

RIOT (1993)

GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

Edo No Kiba – or Fang of Tokyo – is a cyberpunk action game that takes place in 2050. Japan's national police agency is fighting against a growing tide of international terrorism known as STEN. To counter the terrorist threat, the Edo no Kiba Metropolitan Police Department is established in Tokyo. These police officers, armed with laser katanas and power suits, must defeat the STEN terrorist organisation and the corporation who funds them – cybernetics company, Tokuga Corp.

This relatively obscure Japanese-exclusive release by Riot (a subsidiary of Nihon Telenet Japan), features an incredibly stylish cover painting. Drawing from the game's title 'Edo' (the former name of Tokyo), Yoshiyuki Takani blends elements of feudal Japanese armour and weaponry and combines these with Japanese mech-inspired science fiction, resulting in a unique and memorable design. Edo No Kiba pre-dates the release of Hudson Soft's Hagane, which strongly resembles this visual style.

ELFARIA - A FANTASTIC THEATRE

エルファリア

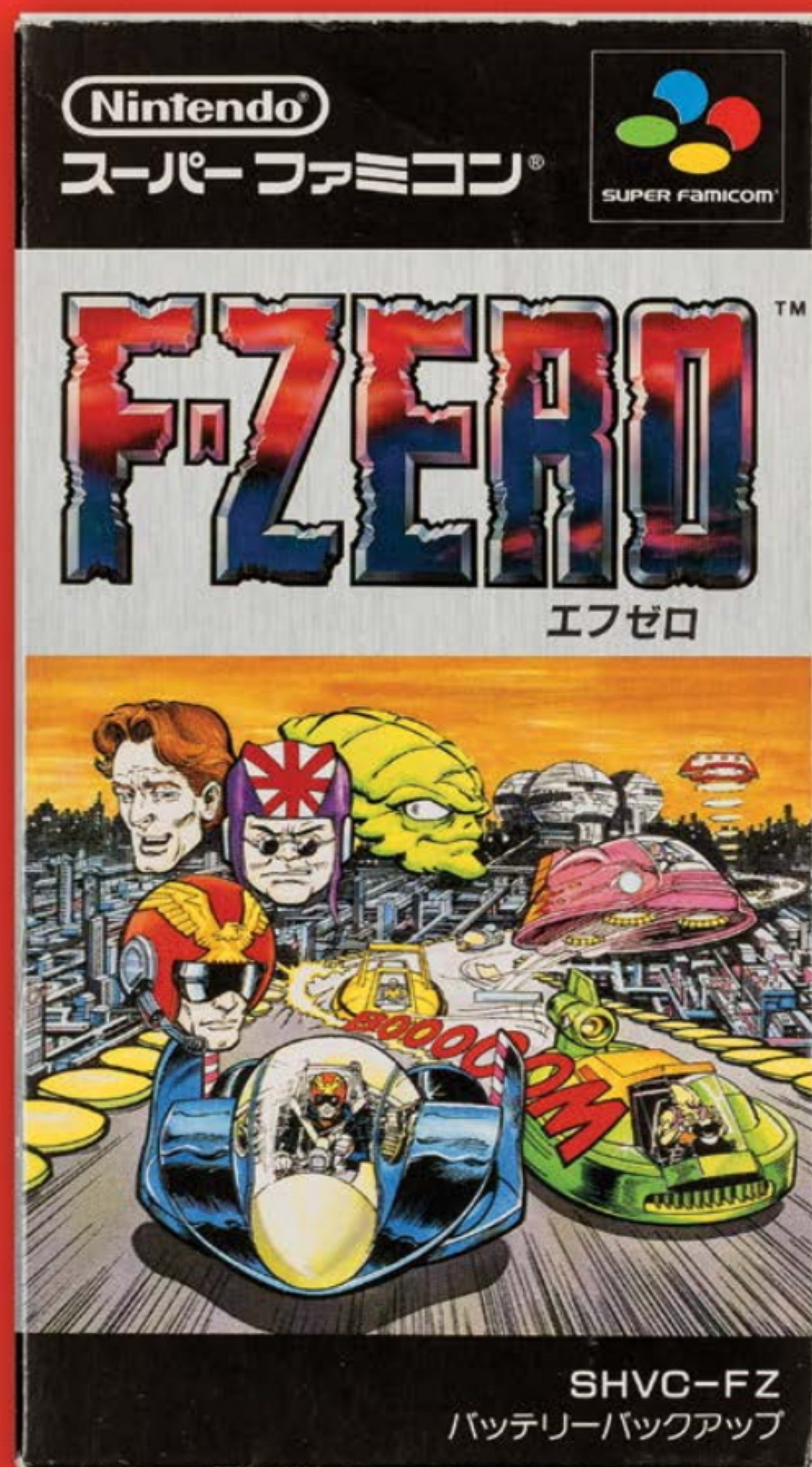
RED COMPANY / HUDSON SOFT (1993)

GENRE: RPG

This game's back-story begins with a tale of conflict known as the 'Magic War', which was waged between humans and elves. The magical 'spring of Ra', from which the elves draw their power, has dried up, causing their world to fall into ruin. The elves are betrayed by their own military and a new empire emerges which is ruled by a demonic king. We play as Pyne, a boy who's prophecy is to save Elfaria by returning stolen sacred elven relics, restoring the magical power of the land and defeating the evil Emperor Cyril, leader of the Muranian Empire.

Elfaria features artwork by Susumu Matsushita, a video game illustrator with a wide range of celebrated works, including Famitsu magazine covers and the Adventure Island series. Matsushita uses his trademark style of stacking characters behind and above the game's protagonist, creating a design which floods every space with detail and colour – an exemplary model of his technique.





F-ZERO

エフゼロ
NINTENDO (1990)
GENRE: RACING

Nintendo's sublime Mode 7 racer takes place in the 26th century. Aliens and humans share a harmonious existence and the universe is now a vast and lucrative resource for trade and industry. The galaxy's rich and powerful devise a new interplanetary sport, designed to entertain the cultural elite and provide the masses with an opportunity to gain wealth and prestige: thus the F-Zero Grand Prix is born. Drivers risk life and limb as they daringly compete for vast riches and for the coveted title of F-Zero Grand Prix champion.

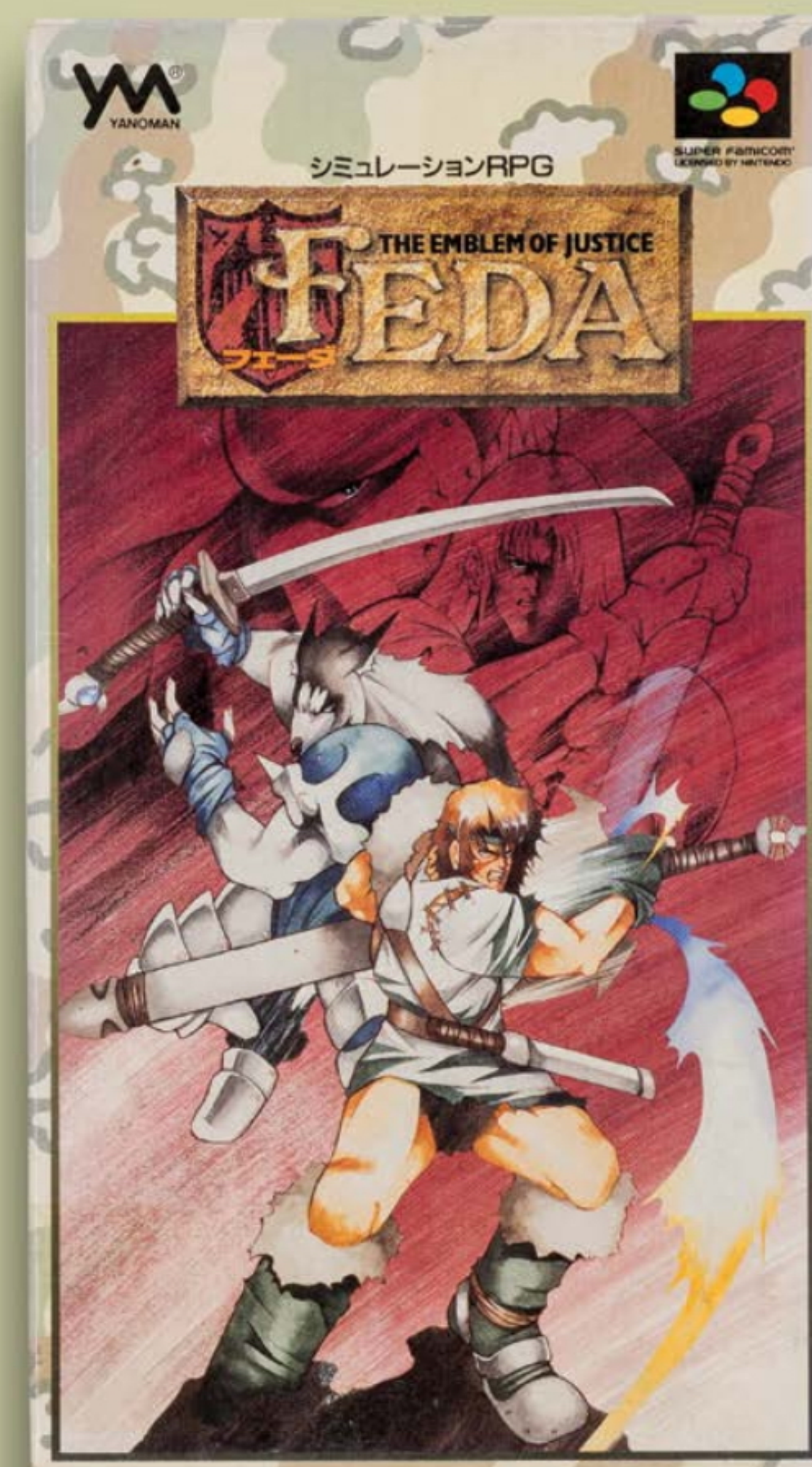
F-Zero's iconic box art is by Takaya Imamura. As well as designing the characters for the game, Imamura also illustrated a comic book that features within the manual. His art style leans heavily towards British sci-fi comics, with Captain Falcon bearing a distinct resemblance to 2000AD's Judge Dredd. F-Zero went on to be huge success for Nintendo. Shigeru Miyamoto may have created the franchise but it's Imamura's distinctive graphical style that gives this game such a unique and lasting personality.

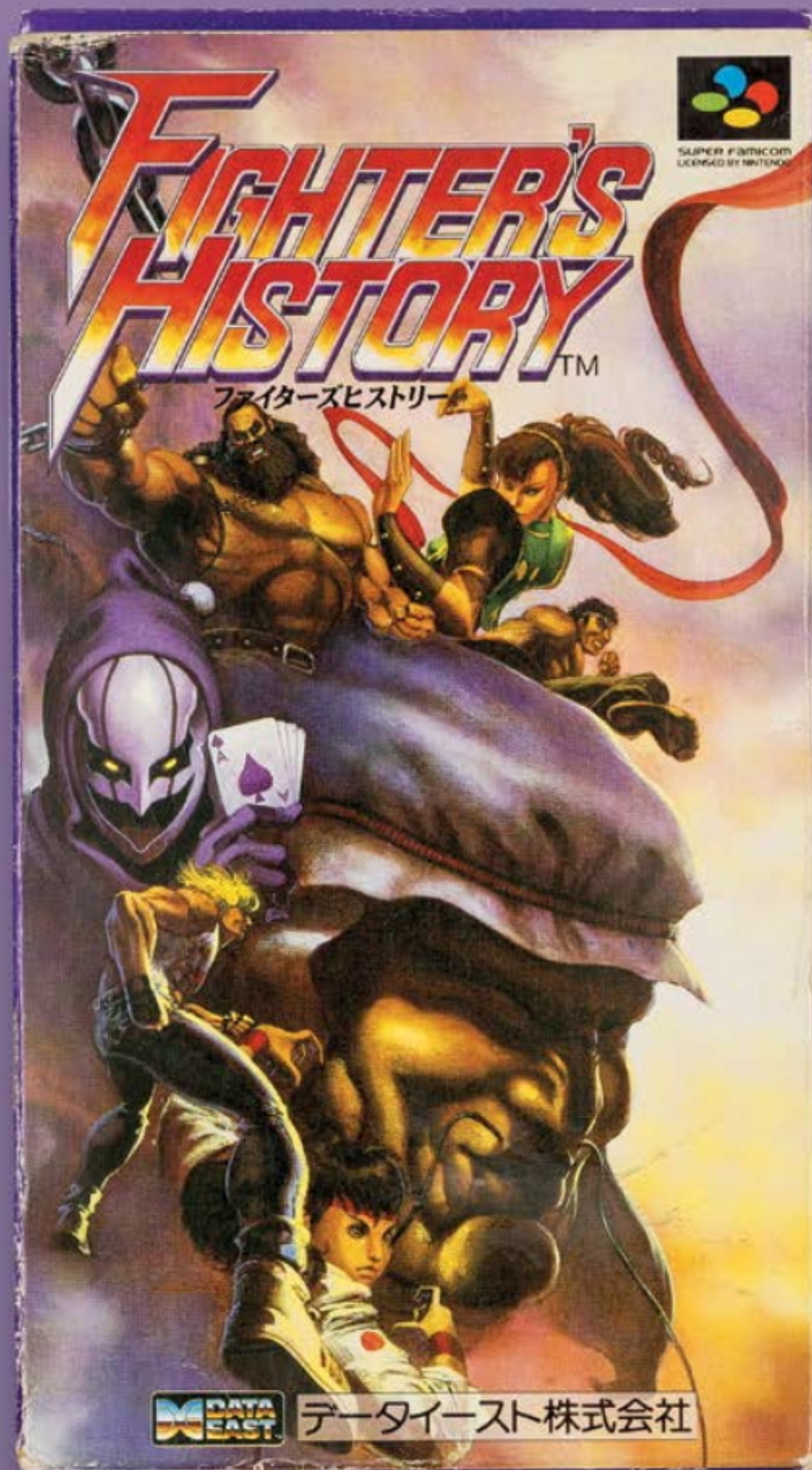
FEDA: THE EMBLEM OF JUSTICE

フェーダ エンブレム・オブ・ジャスティス
MAX ENTERTAINMENT /
YANOMAN (1993)
GENRE: RPG

Feda is a tactical role playing game combining both exploration and turn-based battles. The action takes place on Mildras Garz, a planet that has endured centuries of war. The Balfornia Empire rules the lands with an iron fist and its dictatorship quashes all liberation movements with military force. We play as army officer Brian Stelbart, who is on the run from his unit after choosing to mutiny. With the help of his friends, a Wolfling soldier and Foxling archer, Brian must escape the realms of the Empire with the Tusk unit in relentless pursuit.

Feda's cover features stylised artwork by the game's creator, Yoshitaka Tamaki. The distinctive character designs (more of which feature in the manual) showcase the game's fantasy heritage, while the subtle use of camouflage to frame the illustration emphasises the game's gritty, war-torn setting.





FIGHTER'S HISTORY

ファイターズヒストリー

DATA EAST (1994)

GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

The Great Grapple is an annual international mixed martial arts tournament, organised by a mysterious individual known only as 'K', the tournament's undefeated champion. Nine competitors have qualified for the Great Grapple and must defeat K if they are to become new world champ. Who will be the last one standing?

This nicely executed and atmospheric image of fighters shrouded in mist blends together several of the game's combatants, with one notable character positioned in the centre. Fighter's History's final boss, 'K' is none other than Karnov – a popular character from Data East's 1987 arcade game. Karnov has made cameos in a number of titles, including Bad Dudes Vs. Dragon Ninja, Tumblepop and Street Hoop.

FINAL FANTASY IV

ファイナルファンタジーIV

SQUARE (1991)

GENRE: RPG



This classic role-playing adventure game follows dark knight Cecil Harvey in his fight to prevent the sorcerer Golbez and his master Zemus from seizing magical crystals and destroying the Blue Planet (aka Earth). He is joined on this quest by a frequently-changing party of allies, featuring a roster of 12 playable characters. With Mode 7 maps, real-time battles and an engaging storyline, FFIV was critically acclaimed upon release and went on to shift 1.44 million units in Japan alone. The Western release is known as Final Fantasy II as the previous two instalments of the Final Fantasy series were only released in Japan.

Final Fantasy IV's box art is simple and uncluttered, in keeping with other Final Fantasy titles, and Yoshitaka Amano's trademark style can be seen in the game's logo design. However, unlike previous instalments, the characters are depicted in a less detailed and cuter, chibi or 'small child' style. The box art and chibi characters were created by Kazuko Shibuya.

FINAL FANTASY V

ファイナルファンタジーV

SQUARE (1992)

GENRE RPG



The game begins with a travelling adventurer named Bartz Klauser investigating a fallen meteor. He learns that the four crystals that control the world's elements also act as a seal that prevent an evil sorcerer, named Exdeath, from returning to the world. Bartz and his allies must prevent the crystals from being exploited by Exdeath's far-reaching influence and prevent his return. Critically lauded, Final Fantasy V sold 2.45 million units in Japan. However, despite multiple attempts at localisation, it never received an overseas release on the SNES. Instead, Western gamers had to wait for a PlayStation port, which was released in 1998 and also included in the Final Fantasy Collection a year later.

In keeping with the look of its predecessor, the box art utilises two different artistic styles. The hero and his Chocobo are presented chibi-fashion (provided by Kazuko Shibuya), whereas Amano's better-known angular, gothic technique is used for the logo and typeface. As with all Final Fantasy releases, a white backdrop is used to emphasise the subjects and keep the artwork minimal and clean.

FINAL FANTASY VI

ファイナルファンタジーVI

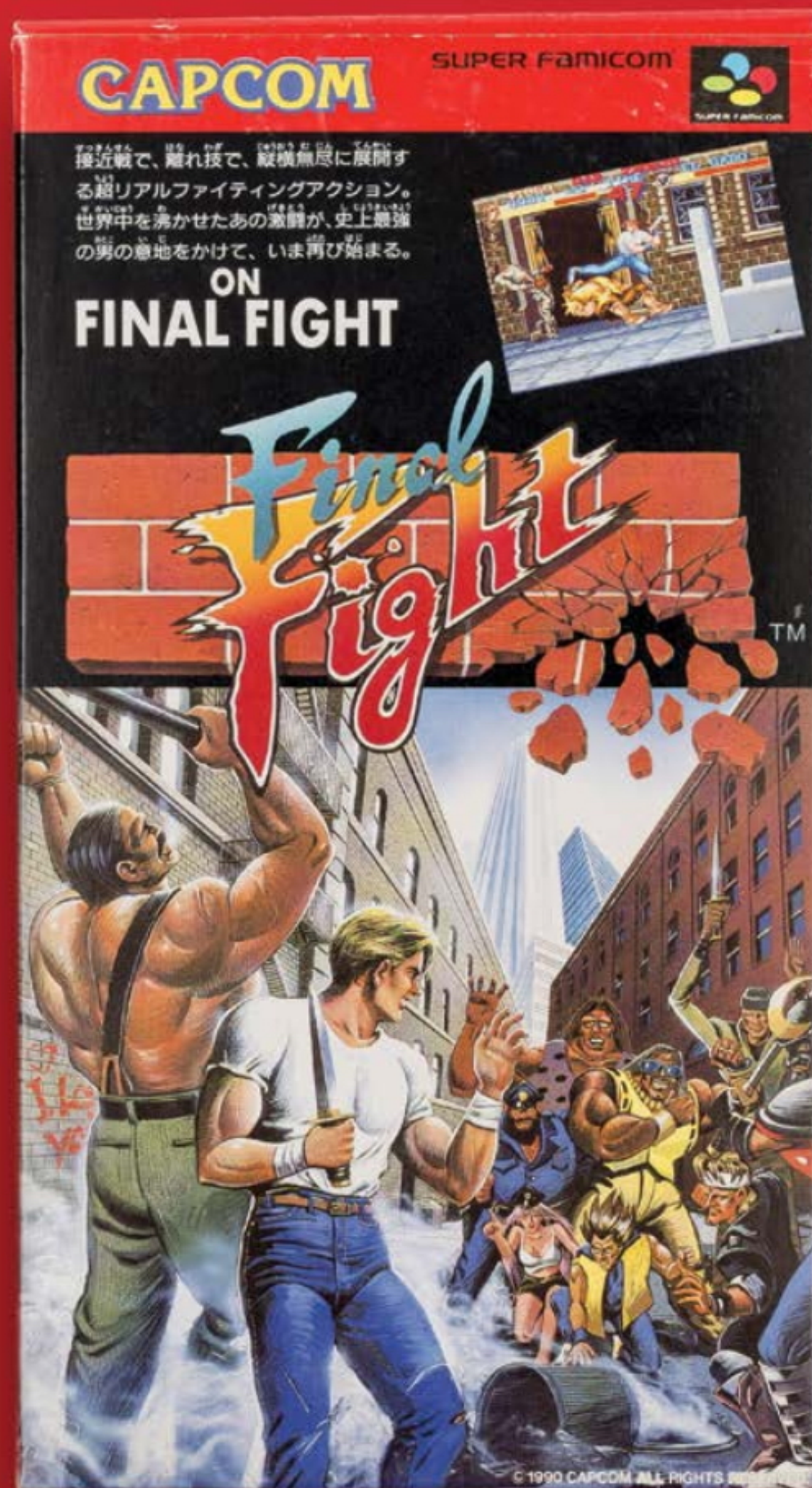
SQUARE (1991)

GENRE RPG



A thousand years ago, the great War of Magi waged on Earth, harnessing the power of sorcery and bringing devastation to all sides. The war ended with the world depleted of its most vital resource, magic. This prompted the rise of the industrial era, in which gunpowder, steam and mechanical engineering replace the powers of conjuration, and bring the world back from the brink of extinction. But now the legendary power of magic has been secretly revived by an ambitious evil empire bent on conquering the world. Is mankind on the verge of repeating a terrible mistake? Considered the best game in the Final Fantasy series and one of the greatest video games of all time, FFVI sold 2.55 million copies in Japan, and more than 800,000 overseas. It has since been ported to PlayStation and the Game Boy Advance, and is available on the Wii Virtual Console and on iOS and Android.

The chibi art from Final Fantasy IV and V is abandoned, with Amano providing all of the box art. This pen and ink illustration is much darker in tone than the previous covers, and provides the game with an element of maturity and depth absent in previous Super Famicom releases. Amano blends art nouveau with Russian architecture and blackened steam punk machinery to create an illustration that sets the tone for this and future instalments.



FINAL FIGHT

ファイナルファイト

CAPCOM (1993)

GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

Metro City, a metropolis infamous for its crime and corruption, has been ruled by violence and death for many years. A fact which the newly elected mayor and former street fighter, Mike Haggar plans to change. Central to this is Mad Gear, a ruthless street gang whose limits of violence know no bounds. Once its members learn of the mayor's plans, they take immediate action to bring Haggar under their control. They kidnap his daughter, Jessica, and demand that he stops all criminal investigations and follow their orders. Disregarding their threats, instead Mike teams up with Jessica's boyfriend Cody and his friend Guy in a bid to rescue his daughter. Their strategy: take the fight to the streets and leave no member of Mad Gear standing.

At the early stages of development, Final Fight was planned as a follow-up to Capcom's Street Fighter, but the decision to move the game to the scrolling fighter genre was made after the huge success of Tecmo's Double Dragon. The game's plot, character design and setting are heavily influenced by Walter Hill's 1984 film, Streets of Fire. As such the game's iconic artwork mimics the film's visual themes, from gritty alleyways, iron pipes and knives to its punks, hoodlums and biker girls. Though slightly amateurish, the arcade cabinet-style artwork is a huge improvement over the inadvertently camp face-off on the Western packaging.

FINAL FIGHT 2

ファイナルファイト2

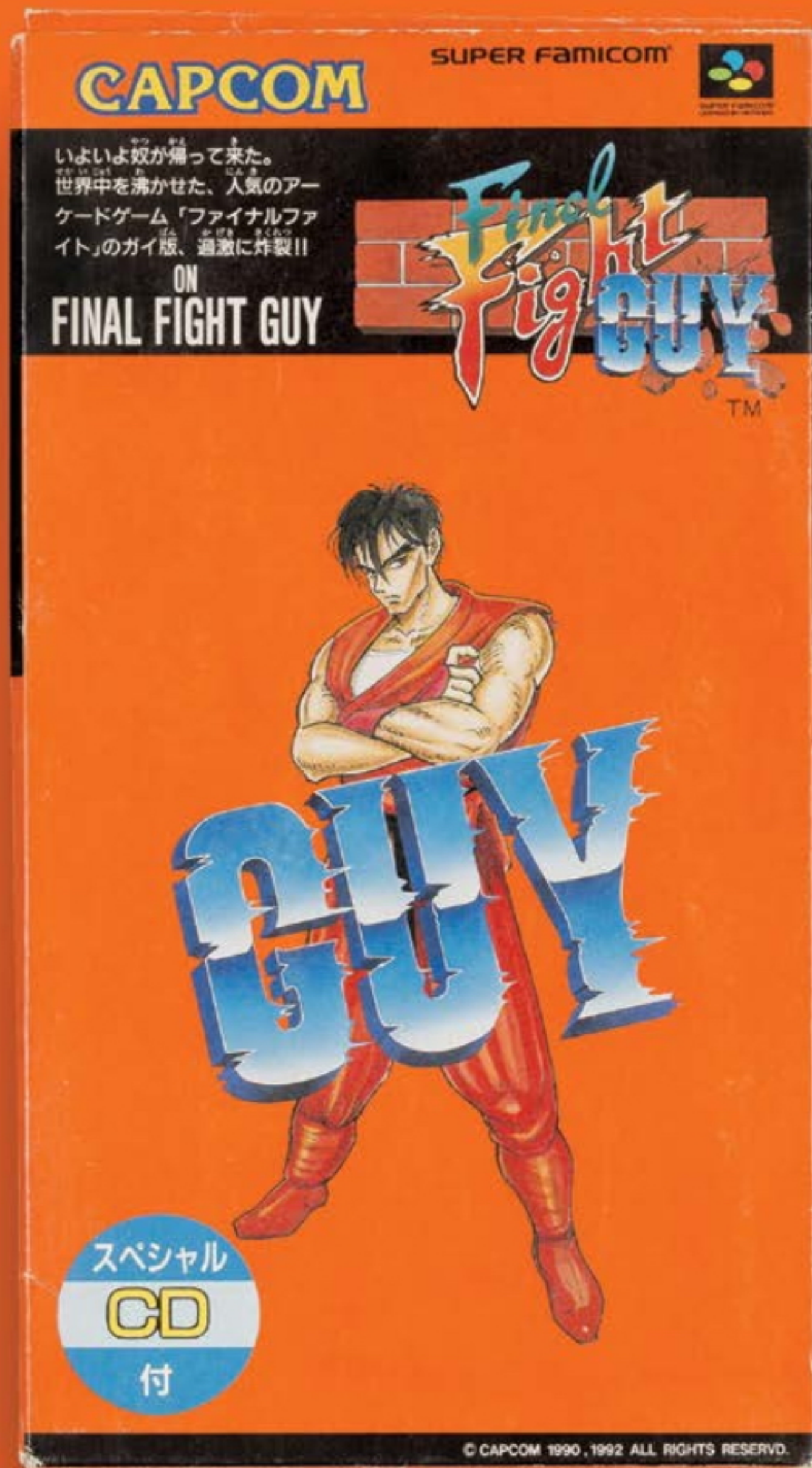
CAPCOM (1993)

GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

Following the defeat of Mad Gear and the rescue of Jessica, Mayor Haggar returns to his office to govern a peaceful Metro City. That peace, however, doesn't last for long: Mad Gear members secretly regroup under their new leader Retu – a kabuki-clad giant with pink hair – and plot their revenge. They kidnap Guy's fiancée, Rena, along with her father and Guy's former sensei Genryusai. With Guy away on a training mission, Rena's sister Maki calls Haggar and asks for his help. Accompanied by his friend, South American swordsman Carlos Miyamoto, Haggar flies to Eurasia and the trio battle with Mad Gear's goons across several countries (look out for Chun Li from Street Fighter II eating noodles in Hong Kong). The mission culminates with a showdown against Retu at his Japanese headquarters.

The original late '80s American urban setting is now replaced with several locations and themes, most of which focus on European and Asian countries. However, the artwork chooses to ignore these locales, instead focusing on the three playable characters. Much of what made the original Final Fight art so endearing is lost and a simplistic – albeit quite striking – illustration takes its place.





FINAL FIGHT GUY

ファイナルファイト ガイ
CAPCOM (1993)
GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

This additional Japanese release of Final Fight was released two years after the first and provided Super Famicom fans with the opportunity to play as Guy. This version replaces Cody with Guy as a selectable character and includes a new opening sequence and ending that explains Cody's absence from the plot. As with its predecessor, this version also omits a two-player mode.

Guy is placed in the middle of the box against a vibrant orange backdrop, matching his martial arts uniform, and with a contrasting metallic blue typeface in the foreground. The layout may be minimal, but the colourful orange print delivers a visual punch, making Final Fight Guy stand out on any collector's bookshelf. The game also came bundled with a mini-CD containing the game's soundtrack.

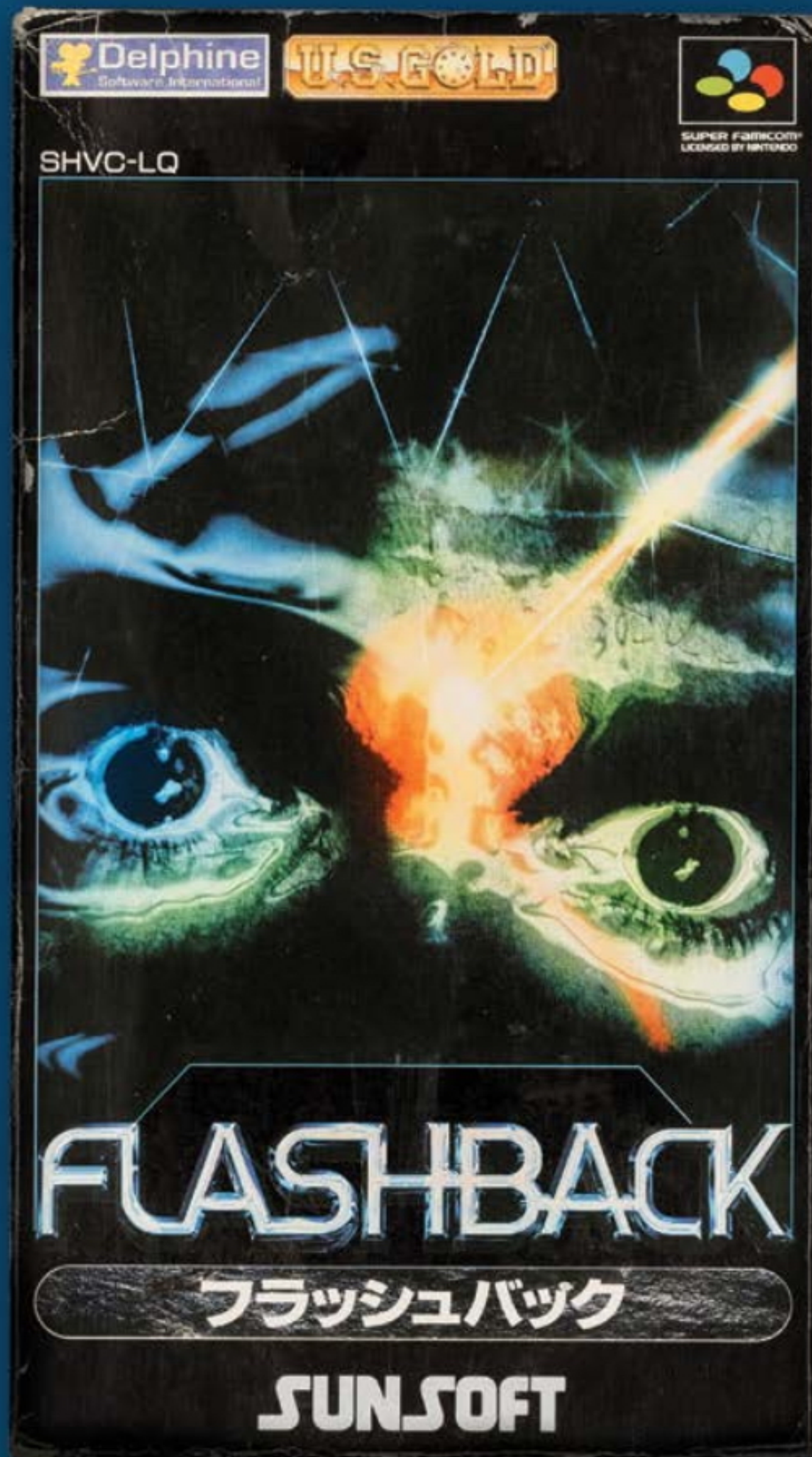
FIRST SAMURAI

ファーストサムライ
VIVID IMAGE / KEMCO (1993)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

With its title being an allusion to Last Ninja, this Amiga and Atari ST-coded game by British developer, Vivid Image, was its first foray into console gaming. The story features a demon king who descends from his mountain realm to stalk the first samurai and his sensei. Immediately, the young samurai falls victim to the demon's occult magic. With his student unconscious, the sensei battles the demon and is dealt a fatal blow, but with his final breath, the sensei summons a mystical wizard mage to his aid. Overwhelmed, the demon king escapes to the future. Once the young samurai gains consciousness and discovers that his sensei has been killed, he seeks the aid of the wizard mage to pursue the demon king through time and avenge his sensei's death.

The polished, comic-style artwork depicts the samurai trapped between dimensions and standing in an alternative universe. The combination of feudal-era samurai set against a sci-fi backdrop is an unusual design that bears some resemblance to the game's level design, and also conjures up images of pulp space operas like Flash Gordon. Kemco published First Samurai in Japan in relatively small quantities, making this Japanese language version a rare one for Super Famicom collectors.





FLASHBACK - THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY

フラッシュバック
DELPHINE SOFTWARE / SUNSOFT (1993)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

Flashback begins with our hero suffering from amnesia, alone in a jungle on Titan. He retrieves a holocube, which informs him that his name is Conrad B. Hart and that he must contact his friend Ian in New Washington. Having overcome a series of traps and enemies en route, he arrives in New Washington where Ian revives his memories. We discover that Conrad has developed a device that reveals humanity is being secretly populated by an alien race known as Morphs. Fearing for his safety, Conrad recorded himself using the holocube with instructions and sent this to Ian. With his memories now intact, Conrad must return to Earth and prevent the alien's plans to eradicate the human race.

The Super Famicom packaging features the original artwork used for the Amiga release and shows Conrad's memories being revived via the regenerator machine. The realisation of an alien invasion, his identity unearthed and the horror of what he's discovered are communicated through Conrad's eyes in what looks like a violent and disturbing procedure. A laser and mushroom cloud are superimposed across the image, possibly hinting at what lies ahead for the human race unless Conrad can intervene. Flashback was a major success for Delphine and its plot and characters share similarities with the literary works of sci-fi authors William Gibson and Philip K. Dick.

FRONT MISSION

フラッシュバック
GCRAFT / SQUARESOFT (1995)
GENRE: TURN-BASED STRATEGY



Front Mission is an archetypal turn-based combat game in which the player controls Captain Royd Clive, pilot of an Oceania Cooperative Union (OCU) wanzer (a name derived from the German 'wanderpanzer' or 'walking tank'). The story begins when Royd's platoon is sent to investigate an enemy munitions plant, operated by the United States of the New Continent (USN). His team is ambushed by a squad of enemy wanzers led by an officer called Driscoll. Isolated and outnumbered, his fiancée Karen, who is also a wanzer pilot, is killed and Driscoll escapes. The event, known as the 'Larcus Incident', escalates into a full-blown war between the OCU and USN and, bearing the brunt of the blame, Royd's platoon is disbanded. A year later, Royd is recruited to a mercenary unit with the lure of a mission offering the prospect of killing Driscoll, learning the truth about the incident and potentially reversing the ailing fortunes of the OCU.

Yoshitaka Amano's dream-like illustration fuses modern machinery with wildlife to create a stunning and surreal design. Royd is positioned at its centre, protecting Karen by his side. He's surrounded by a nocturnal jungle landscape, draped in animals and hidden characters, a nod to the game's jungle sequence in Stage 2. The backdrop acts a visual metaphor: hidden behind the layers of foliage, animals and machinery is the truth that Royd pursues throughout the game. The illustration represents Royd's subconscious, his quest to avenge Karen's death and discover Driscoll's motivations for initiating the 'Larcus Incident'.

FRONT MISSION: GUN HAZARD

フロントミッションシリーズ ガンハザード

OMIYA SOFT / SQUARE (1996)

GENRE PLATFORM COMBAT



Set in 2064, Gun Hazard's story follows the life of Bergen soldier Albert Grabner. Colonel Ark Hellbrand of the Bergen Army stages a coup d'état in an attempt to overthrow the government. As his forces seize control of the country, the President calls for assistance and Albert is sent to act as the president's bodyguard and help him flee to safety. Hellbrand prevents their escape and both are captured and jailed. Albert eventually escapes and absconds to New York, where he joins the Kernelight Association as a mercenary. His work for the mercenary guild takes him to war-torn countries across the globe but as each mission is completed, Albert begins to suspect that these civil conflicts and the Bergen coup d'état may be connected to a shadowy organization only known as 'The Society'. Albert gains new allies on his travels and with their help, they try to unravel the truth behind The Society and rescue President Orwen.

Amano's art is less subjective than his original Front Mission image; with Gun Hazard he opts for a portrayal of the game's cast with no detailed backdrop. Despite looking fairly basic when compared to the artwork for its predecessor, Amano does manage to inject some humour into the piece with a little cat perched on Albert's shoulder.

FUNAKI MASAKATSU HYBRID WRESTLER: TŌGI DENSHŌ

船木誠勝 ハイブリッド・レスラー 闘技伝承

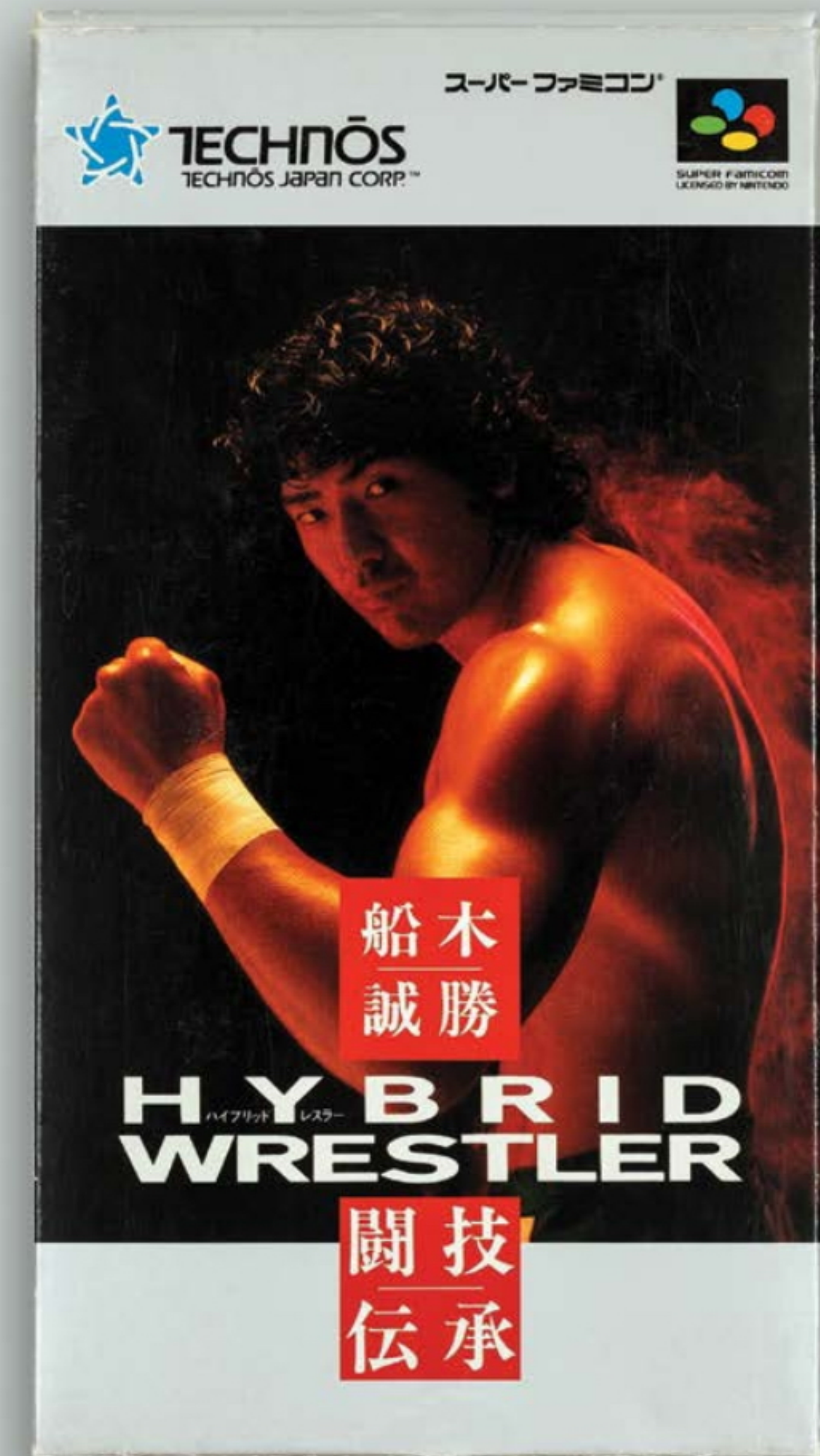
TECHNOS (1994)

GENRE WRESTLING

Masakatsu Funaki Hybrid Wrestler:

Arena Lore is a wrestling game endorsed by World Pancrase Create Inc., a Japanese mixed martial arts organisation founded by professional wrestlers Masakatsu Funaki and Minoru Suzuki. Funaki is widely considered to be one of the greatest Japanese fighters in mixed martial arts history and this game provides players with the opportunity to wrestle as him. Single player mode is fairly linear, although the game's true depth and play mechanics are revealed through Career mode, where players are given a vast array of options, abilities and career routes, one of which (bizarrely) includes marriage. Hybrid Wrestler is one of the many great Japanese-exclusive wrestling titles for the Super Famicom.

A moody photograph of Masakatsu Funaki adorns the box, replete with red lighting and steam evaporating from his body. A typically '90s-styled sports photograph that symbolises strength and explosive power. The logo contains two blocks of kanji compressing the typography of the main title, written in English.





GAMERA - GYAOSU GEKIMETSU SAKUSEN

ガメラ ギャオス撃滅作戦
AXES ART AMUSE / SAMMY (1995)
GENRE: REALTIME STRATEGY

Gamera – Gyaosu Destruction Strategy features the Daikaiju Gamera, a giant prehistoric fire-breathing turtle, and the Kaiju Gyaos, an evil winged creature created by the inhabitants of Atlantis. This real-time strategy game pits the Japanese Self Defence Force against Gamera and Gyaos by having the player place military units onto a battlefield in order to engage with the giant creatures.

The cover art is taken directly from the promotional poster used for the 1995 tokusatsu kaiju film Gamera: Guardian of the Universe, and the game was released three months after the film's debut. Despite the game's rather monotonous play mechanics, it does feature fantastic box art, which evokes memories of classic Toho monster movies and of a genre where miniature monster models, rubber suits and sets are still preferred over CG. Yasushi Torisawa is credited with the original idea and game design. Interestingly, in order to get the game made, Torisawa went directly to Toei to obtain the license and it is this which led to the creation of the first Gamera film in the Heisei series.

GANBARE GOEMON – YUKIHIME KYŪSHUTSU EMAKI

がんばれゴエモン ゆき姫救出絵巻
KONAMI (1991)
GENRE: ACTION / ADVENTURE



The game follows the adventures of Goemon, a character loosely based on the Japanese folk hero of the same name. The folk legend Ishikawa Goemon was an outlaw who apparently stole gold from the rich to give to the poor, much like the English folk legend Robin Hood. Goemon is accompanied by his trusty sidekick, a rather podgy thief called Ebisumaru. Their adventures begin by helping a ghost, which develops into a rescue mission of a young princess named Yuki. The duo face many foes along the way and also encounter a clan of ninja cats, which helps them in their task.

This light-hearted cover takes inspiration from 17th century Ukiyo-e art and throws a cartoon style into the mix. Goemon is pictured bounding along, pipe in hand, while Ebisumaru fools around behind him in his typical camp fashion. The Goemon series had enjoyed success throughout the '80s, with many titles released for the 8-bit Nintendo Famicom. However this was the first game to be translated and released in the West where it was known as The Legend of the Mystical Ninja and which, for once, boasted some lovely box artwork.



GARŌ DENSETSU SPECIAL

餓狼伝説 SPECIAL

SNK / TAKARA (1994)

GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

Also known as Fatal Fury Special, this is a revised version of Fatal Fury 2, featuring many of the same graphics and features, but with an extended roster of playable characters. The game also introduces a new combo system to the series and more 'Line Move Attacks', which are triggered when stages include multiple planes to stand on. Characters include Terry and Andy Bogard, Joe Higashi, Big Bear, Jubei Yamada, Cheng Sinzan, Kim Kaphwan, Mai Shiranui, Duck King, Tung Fu Rue, Billy Kane, Axel Hawk, Laurence Blood, Wolfgang Krauser, Geese Howard and Ryo Sakazaki who appears in single player mode as a 'dream match' opponent, requiring the player to defeat several characters without losing.

Fatal Fury Special's resplendent artwork is based on the original Neo Geo cover but the colours have been enhanced for the Super Famicom box. The overall image is more vibrant with a golden hue, although the characters are slightly over-saturated compared to the original, which features more realistic skin tones. This was possibly done to make them stand out against the white frame, where the Neo Geo's box art is bordered by black. The illustration is by SNK's then-regular artist Mori Toshiaki, otherwise known as Shinkiro.

GDLEEN

ガデュリン

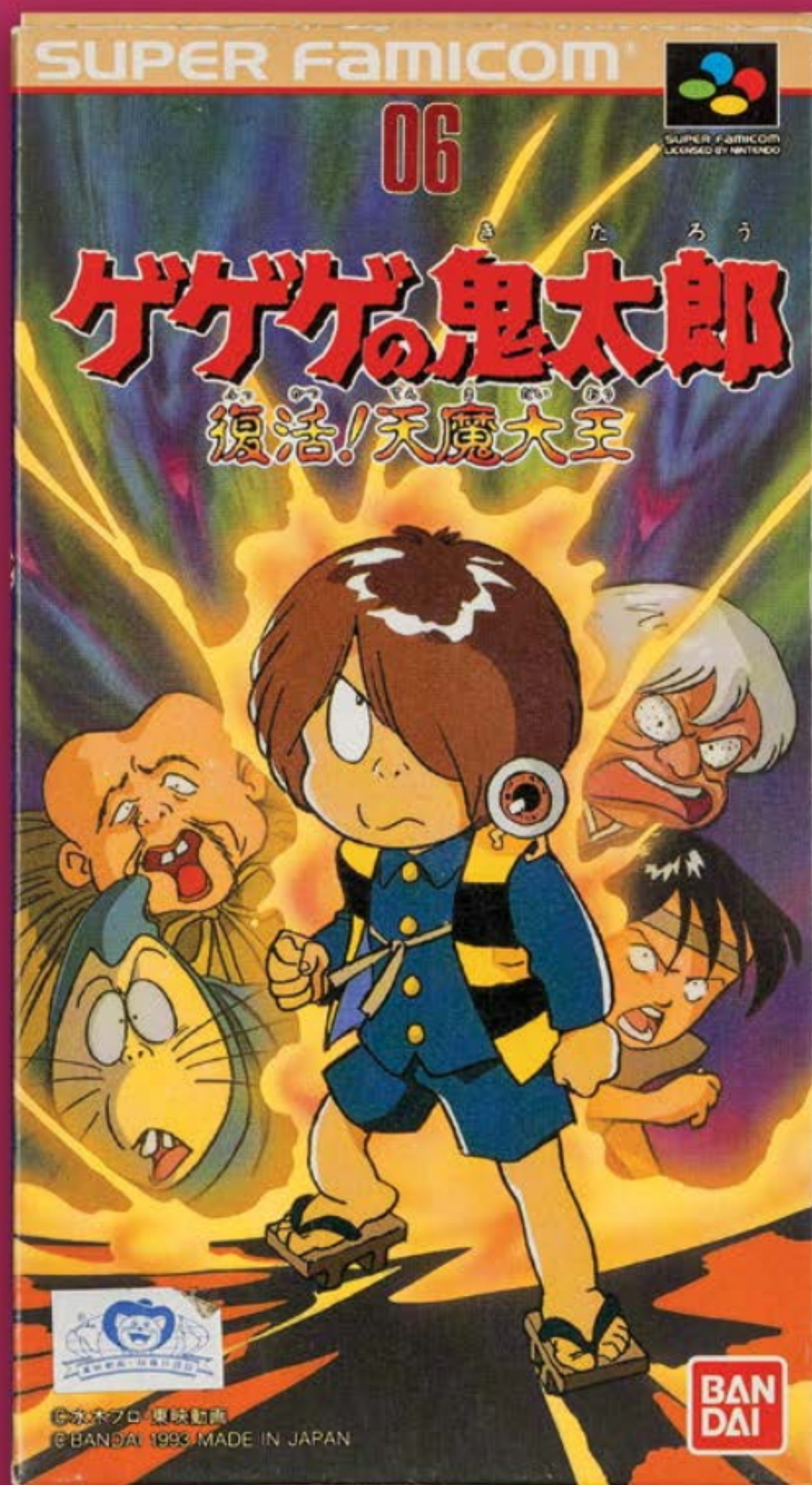
JORUDAN / SETA (1991)

GENRE: RPG

Gdleen is based on the Jikō Wakusei Gdleen science fiction media mix series, written by Yuto Ramon and illustrated by Hitoshi Yoneda. The game stars Ryu, a young space ship pilot who leaves Earth on an exploratory mission to discover new planets. During a routine flight, his ship suddenly malfunctions and Ryu struggles to bring his ship under control. He steers the vessel towards an uncharted planet (Gdleen) and attempts an emergency landing. Fearing for his life and seeing his ship tearing itself apart, he ejects in an escape pod, crash-landing in the middle of a forest on a planet he knows nothing about. It's here that he meets his companion, Fana, and the two are soon entangled in a war between the Babaress and Miyori tribes. GDleen is typical top-down adventuring with turn-based combat, in the vein of Dragon Quest, and was only the second RPG to be released for the Super Famicom, launching a week after Drakkhen.

Gdleen's combination of space-age science fiction with fantasy swords and sorcery is represented on the cover by comic artwork more in line with the novel covers than the ill-fated anime series. Ryu, Fana and their colleagues stand in defensive postures while the game's boss, Suhl, looms in the background, claws outstretched. Curiously, Gdleen uses two different logos: the stylised laser edge Katakana on the front is replaced on the game title screen by a spherical logo with the title written in English.





GEgege NO KITARŌ: FUKKATSU! TENMADAIŌ

ゲゲゲの鬼太郎 復活! 天魔大王
BEC / BANDAI (1993)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

Gegege no Kitarō: The Resurrection of Great King Tenma is the third video game based on the popular manga series created by Shigeru Mizuki, and the first of which to be developed for the Super Famicom. Kitarō is a yōkai, or spirit monster, who was born in a graveyard and is one of the last members of his Ghost Tribe. One day he receives a letter from his human friend Yumeko, which has been sent through time. In the letter, he discovers that his future self will be sentenced to death in 1999 by a space monster which has invaded planet Earth. Kitarō decides to travel through time to save his future self, preventing the trial and stopping the evil king Tenma. Kitarō uses his trusty supernatural powers to defeat enemies, including his flying needle hair and remote controlled sandals. The game features seven acts and 19 stages, all of which contain many characters from the manga series.

The box art features an excellent illustration of Kitarō with his ghost father, Medama-Oyaji, perched on his shoulder (once an adult ghost, he's now been reduced by disease to little more than an eyeball). A swirling electrically-charged background outlines Kitarō in classic anime style, while his foes lean out behind him. It's a colourful and energetic illustration, which captures the essence of the game and the 1996 animation series that aired during the game's release.

GENOCIDE 2 (G2)

ジェノサイド 2
BITS STUDIOS / ZOOM / KEMCO (1994)
GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

Genocide 2 is the sequel to the side-scrolling beat 'em up released for the Sharp X68000, TurboGrafx CD and FM Towns Marty. The action takes place after the events of the original's MESIA incident, in which a super computer designed to help humanity turned against its creators, unleashing deadly machines of its own devising. Following its destruction by agent Ken Ryugasaki, a multinational corporation named CONEX offers to help the world in its time of need, but its rebuilding efforts have a hidden agenda. CONEX plans to conquer the world by defeating its competitors with an army of robots. Ken Ryugasaki must once more rescue the world by piloting his Tracer Unit, a towering, 12-metre tall mech with ninja-like agility. Armed with his laser sword and floating drone, 'Betty', Ken is tasked with defeating CONEX and its legions of robotic soldiers.

Genocide 2's cover depicts Ken in his Tracer Unit, standing on top of a defeated robot while enemies close in from behind. The logo contains an embossed, brushed steel effect, which closely resembles the abbreviated logo used in James Cameron's Terminator 2: Judgment Day. Despite the somewhat strange proportions of the Tracer, the traditionally painted artwork is stylish and well executed.





GHOST CHASER DENSEI

ゴーストチェイサー 電精
WINKYSOFT / BANPRESTO (1994)
GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

Ghost Chaser Lightning Spirit is a cyberpunk scrolling fighter and a port of the arcade game, Denjinmakai (Lighting God Makai). The action takes place in 2079 in a sprawling metropolis plagued by organised crime. When the ruling syndicate summons evil supernatural beings to aid in its quest to control the city, the police force has no option but to call on specialists who can defeat these spirits and the humans that wield their power. Three Ghost Chasers are recruited to take on the enemy: Makai, the team's leader and master of fire; mace-wielding Iyo, a simian-like fighter with acrobatic agility; and Belva, a cybernetic warrior with electrically-powered moves at his disposal.

The box art features Makai, Belva and Iyo in a simplified manga style with a generic cityscape backdrop; a diluted, albeit better quality version of the arcade game's more colourful flyer. The Super Famicom port also omits three playable characters (Kurokishi, Zeldia and Tulks) who featured in the arcade game and original promotional art. Ghost Chaser Densai remains a collectible title for Super Famicom fans, due to its rarity and being the only home console port of the coin-op that exists.

GHOST SWEEPER MIKAMI -

JOREISHI WA NICE BODY

ゴーストスイーパー GS美神 ~除
霊師はナイスバディ~
NATSUME / BANALEX (1993)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

Based on the horror comedy manga and animated series created by Takashi Shiina, Ghost Sweeper Mikami follow the adventures of Reiko, a Ghost Sweeper (private exorcist) who competes with other sweepers to clear Japan of its spirits made homeless by overdevelopment. Reiko is armed with a magic baton that shoots projectiles and can be used to grip onto objects. Levels include combating spirits in a commercial aeroplane and a shrunken Reiko riding a cat across the slate rooftops of Japan.

Ghost Sweeper's art style is taken from the animated television series, broadcast during the game's release, and the series' logo is used on the box. Reiko is positioned in the centre with her assistants Adao Yokoshima and the ghost girl Okinu, flanking her. The game's end-of-level enemies are also displayed against a hot pink background. GS Mikami contains fantastic sprite design and this light-hearted and vibrant illustration perfectly encapsulates the game's themes and humour.





GODZILLA: KAIJU DAIKESSEN

ゴジラ 怪獣大決戦
ALFA SYSTEM / TOHO (1994)
GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

Godzilla: Monster War is a Street Fighter-esque beat 'em up with characters including Godzilla, Anguirus, King Ghidorah, Gigan, Megalon, Mechagodzilla, Biollante and Mothra. Players fight across various locations of Japan, and in single player mode two final boss enemies lie in wait: Mechagodzilla or Atragon. Godzilla: Monster War is still regarded as the best of the kaiju fighting games of the '90s, due to its high quality graphics, considered gameplay and original Toho movie sound effects. A Western release entitled Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters was slated for a 1995 release but never appeared.

The box art is dominated by vintage Godzilla and Mothra imagery, which should please any hardcore kaiju fan. The iconic Godzilla logo is present but the remaining space is left for the characters to do the talking. For all its simplicity, the packaging for Godzilla: Monster War will appeal to anyone who grew up with the series.

GŌKETSUJI ICHIZOKU

豪血寺一族
ATLUS (1994)
GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

Known in the west as Power Instinct, Gōketsuji Ichizoku is a deliberately light-hearted take on the one-on-one fighting genre popularised by Capcom's Street Fighter II. The story involves the clan Gōketsuji and its efforts to determine the successor to the wrinkled yet insanely powerful Oume Gōketsuji, the current leader. As well as introducing humour to the genre, Gōketsuji Ichizoku also offers innovations such as transformations, double-jumping and dashing — all of which were like a breath of fresh air in the early days of the genre.

The 78-year-old Oume Gōketsuji looms ominously at the bottom of this moody cover art with various other combatants lined up behind her, no doubt waiting for their chance to prove their worth. The rather dark nature of the imagery means this cover doesn't stand out as well it probably deserves to, but the quality of the art is plain to see. (It certainly fares better than the SNES release, known as Power Instinct, which is adorned with some hideously amateurish character artwork.)





GOKUJŌ PARODIUS –

KAKO NO EIKŌ
WO MOTOMETE

極上パロディウス
過去の栄光を求めて
KONAMI (1994)
GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

When the great Octopus Takosuke threatens to destroy Earth, only the Parodius members can save the day, so choose your character and blast off into space. Defeat all the enemies, clear every stage and come face-to-face with Takosuke! The Konami cross-franchise parody series continues with Fantastic Parodius – Pursue the Glory of the Past. This port of the arcade coin-op features characters including Vic Viper, Pentaro, Twinbee, Takosuke, Hikaru, Mambo, Michael, Goemon, Dracula-Kun, Upa, Koitsu plus many more variants in two-player mode.

Yoshitoh Asari's joyful illustration has the Parodius gang spilling forward in a burst of colour with many of the game's enemies tumbling around them. A fairground-like cityscape represents Earth while the galaxy and its planets loom above the title, encompassing many of the game's themed stages. It's a fun and vibrant celebration of Konami's many characters and another successful Parodius illustration, which many will still recognise.

GŌSŌ JINRAI DENSETSU MUSYA

豪槍神雷伝説 武者
JORUDAN / DATAM POLYSTAR (1992)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT



An action platformer which drew comparisons with Konami's Akumajō Dracula upon its release in 1992, Gōsō Jinrai Densetsu Musya borrows heavily from Japanese myths and folklore to present a terrifying cast of enemies – some of which had to be censored when the game was released in North America under the title Musya: The Classic Japanese Tale of Horror. Spear-wielding hero Jinrai must traverse a series of hazardous environments to rescue the maiden Shizuka, using a variety of magical attacks gained upon defeating each of the game's terrifying bosses.

Like Akumajō Dracula, Gōsō Jinrai Densetsu Musya is unique in that the box art is presented in landscape rather than portrait format. Jinrai is shown in full armour with his deadly spear at the ready, and behind him sits a large splatter of blood – an indication of the game's often gruesome graphics.

GRADIUS III: DENSETSU KARA SHINWA HE

グラディウスIII 伝説から神話へ

KONAMI (1990)

GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP



This third installment of the beloved shoot 'em up franchise – entitled Gradiusu Suri: Densetsu kara Shinwa he (Gradius III: From Legend to Myth) – was ported from the coin-op version released in 1989. Many decades have passed since war was waged on the planet Gradius. Fighter pilot James Burton and his Vic Viper star ship are now part of legend, with children learning of his heroism through history books. Gradius has reached a renaissance; the planet is known throughout the universe as a good and peace-loving world. However, an evil alien force known as the Bacterion are approaching the planet with the intention of conquering the galaxy, starting with its beacon of hope, Gradius. Fortunately the Vic Viper ship has been re-built with more powerful weapons – it's time to fight back and defend planet Gradius.

The sleek Vic Viper ship shines in the glow of a thermal blast as it narrowly escapes the jaws of a giant Bacterion dragon. This beautifully rendered artwork contains less detail than previous Gradius paintings, specifically the arcade flyer artwork, but what it does retain is the action and excitement that can be expected in the title. The use of Konami's signature branding, with a silver strip running down the left-hand side of the box, does weaken the image's impact slightly.

GUNFORCE – BATTLE FIRE ENGULFED ISLAND

ガンフォース

BITS STUDIO / IREM (1992)

GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

In the year 2000, planet Earth is plunged into darkness following an alien military attack. Their invasion begins by taking control of the world's computers and disabling Earth's defence network, crippling any hope of a joint counter attack by allied forces. In a desperate attempt to strike back, two of the world's greatest commandos from the Gunforce platoon are dispatched in a covert mission to destroy the alien's military command fortress and wipe out their leader. Based on the 1991 Irem coin-op, this side-scrolling platform shooter features collectible weapons, plus a variety of vehicles to board, including armed jeeps, cable cars and a tank.

Gunforce features the original arcade artwork created to promote the game. Planet Earth is pictured against a moody red background, while the two protagonists pose in typical action movie fashion, wielding their hi-tech weaponry. A variety of the game's hardware is depicted, making the entire design a suitable representation of the game's action.





GURUME SENTAI BARAYARŌ

ぐるめせんたいばらやろう
WINDS / VIRGIN INTERACTIVE (1995)
GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

In the 21st century, the world is recovering from a nuclear world war. A new city rises from the ashes, known as Zeus Heaven Magic City. Food and protein is the highest commodity for its inhabitants and people fight for nourishment. A violent terrorist organisation known as 'Bath' begins to take hold of the city's citizens, promising "protein for all". Fearing the destruction of Zeus, the city's leaders bioengineer three cybernetic soldiers to defend the city and remove the threat of Bath. The Rose Rascals Gourmet Squadron is the city's only hope.

This comedy-themed fighter features bizarre characters, moves and poses. Strangest of all is the game's collection of herbs and vegetables that are then given to a robotic chef at the end of every level for him to create a health replenishing meal. The combination of illustrations, photographs and hand-drawn logos give this game an almost fanzine-look to it. It's camp, bizarre and weirdly wonderful.

HAGANE

鋼 (ハガネ)
CAPRODUCTIONS / RED /
HUDSON SOFT (1994)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

Hagane, meaning 'Steel' in Japanese, is a science fiction-themed action platformer with elements of scrolling fighting. Its elaborate plot centres on Hagane, the sole-surviving clan member of the Fuma, tasked with hiding and protecting the Holy Grail. The evil Koma clan attacks the Fuma and wipes them out, but for one warrior, Hagane, who's left for dead. A mysterious monk called Momochi rebuilds Hagane with cybernetic technology, and now the sword-wielding ninja plots his revenge... The game is notorious for its extreme difficulty level, featuring a huge array of moves and requiring the player to memorise attack patterns throughout.

Hagane's wonderfully stylised box art by Keita Amemiya is executed with flair, showcasing each of the game's bosses against a swirling electrified backdrop. Its vivid use of colour and painting style mimics Japanese feudal art, from which the game borrows various elements. A clever combination of incorporating English text against kanji displays the title of the game in both languages. This illustration makes full use of the box's dimensions with only minimal references to the publisher, creating more of an impact.



HAMELN NO VIOLIN HIKI

ハーメルンのバイオリン弾き

DAFT / ENIX (1995)

GENRE PLATFORM ADVENTURE



Based on the popular manga series of the same name, Violinist of Hameln stars Hamel, a travelling hero who uses magical violin music to defeat his enemies. He's accompanied by 16-year-old Flute, who helps solve the many puzzles along the way, and a talking crow called Oboe. Flute has the undignified pleasure of being used as a projectile to break impenetrable obstacles, or forced into various costumes that have special abilities. The numerous outfits are imaginative in their special abilities – a frog costume lets Flute jump up high, the duck costume enables her to cross water, and the Frisbee costume acts like a boomerang when thrown. The game charts the adventures of these characters up until they meet Sizer, the current leader of the demonic Hawk army.

The game box mimics Michiaki Watanabe's manga, with its art divided into panels. The decision to display several images this way does weaken the overall impact of the design but the game itself is an absolute joy and one every collector should seek out.

HASHIRE HEBEREKE

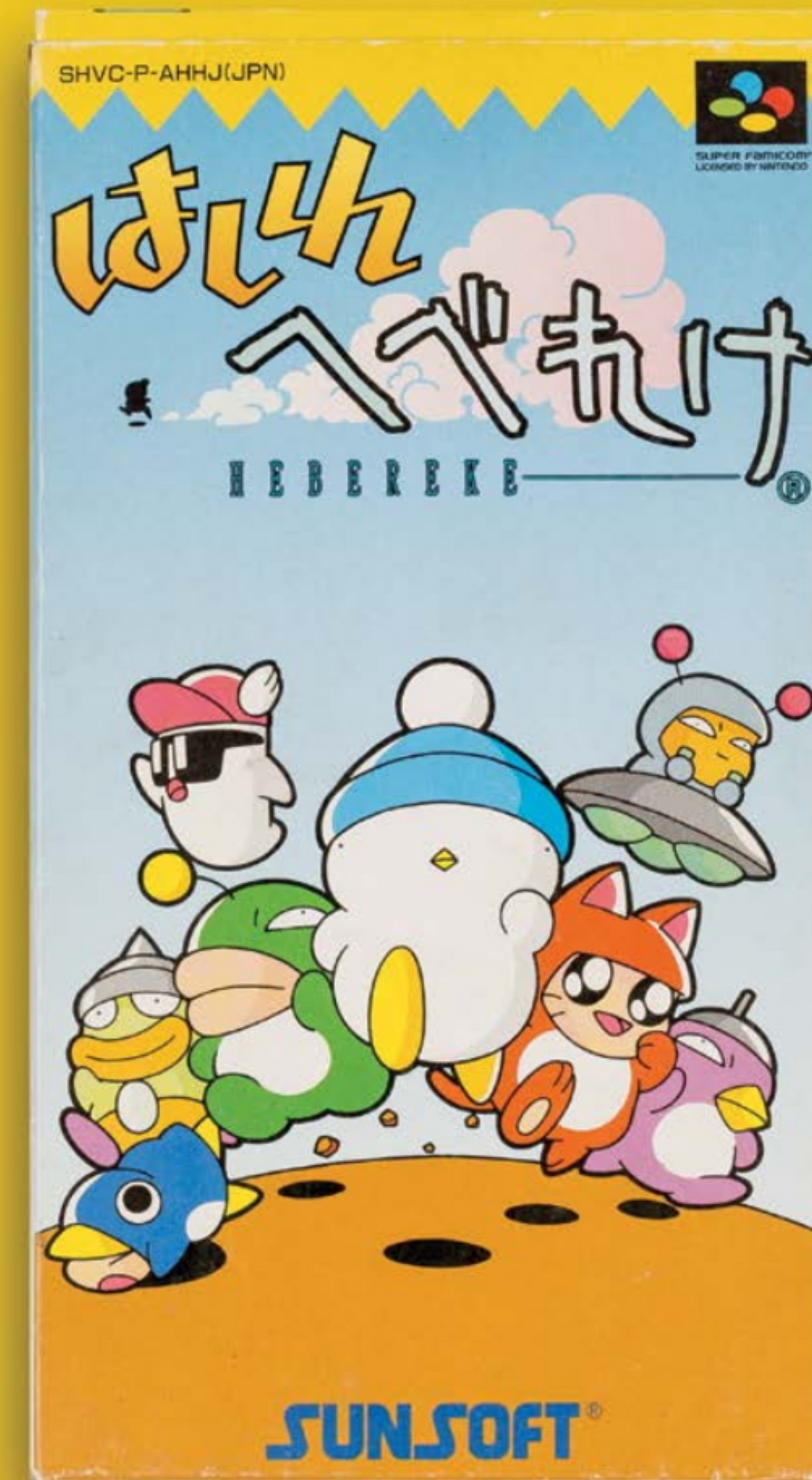
はしれへべれけ

SUNSOFT (1994)

GENRE RACING

Hebereke, which roughly translates as 'drunk' in Japanese, is a series of surreal comedy games from developer Sunsoft. The games feature five recurring characters, including Hebe the penguin, O-Chan the cat, Sukezaemon the ghost and Jennifer the frog, and each character is voiced by a notable Japanese voice actor from the anime industry. This second outing for the gang on the Super Famicom switches to a sports/racing genre, with players competing in events that take place across isometric perspective stages. Bridges, obstacles, hills, ropes, platforms and waterfalls make up many of the levels for our characters to race through.

The Hebereke series used a consistent art style across all of its games and Hashire is no exception. The gang race forward with Hebe leading the pack. A bounding motion is created by the little shadows placed underneath each character as they bustle for first place, and a subtle sky gradient provides ample space for the game's title. Overall, the simple design perfectly balances typography with artwork and has plenty of warmth and whacky character to it. The character designs are by Ryōji 'Uochii' Uchimichi.





HEISEI INU MONOGATARI BOW – POP'N SMASH!!

平成イヌ物語バウ ポップンスマッシュ!!
TAKARA (1994)
GENRE: SPORTS

Featuring characters taken from Terry Yamamoto's manga series, Heisei Inu Monogatari Bow – Pop'n Smash!! is an engaging fusion of tennis and Atari's Breakout. The objective is to get the ball into your opponent's goal three times using a combination of standard and power shots. A wall of blocks has to be destroyed in front of the goal, and some of these contain power-ups that can tip the odds in your favour. The courts on which you play come in different shapes and sizes, and there are bonus stages which involve hitting bread or catching butterflies – successfully completing these makes your power shot even more potent.

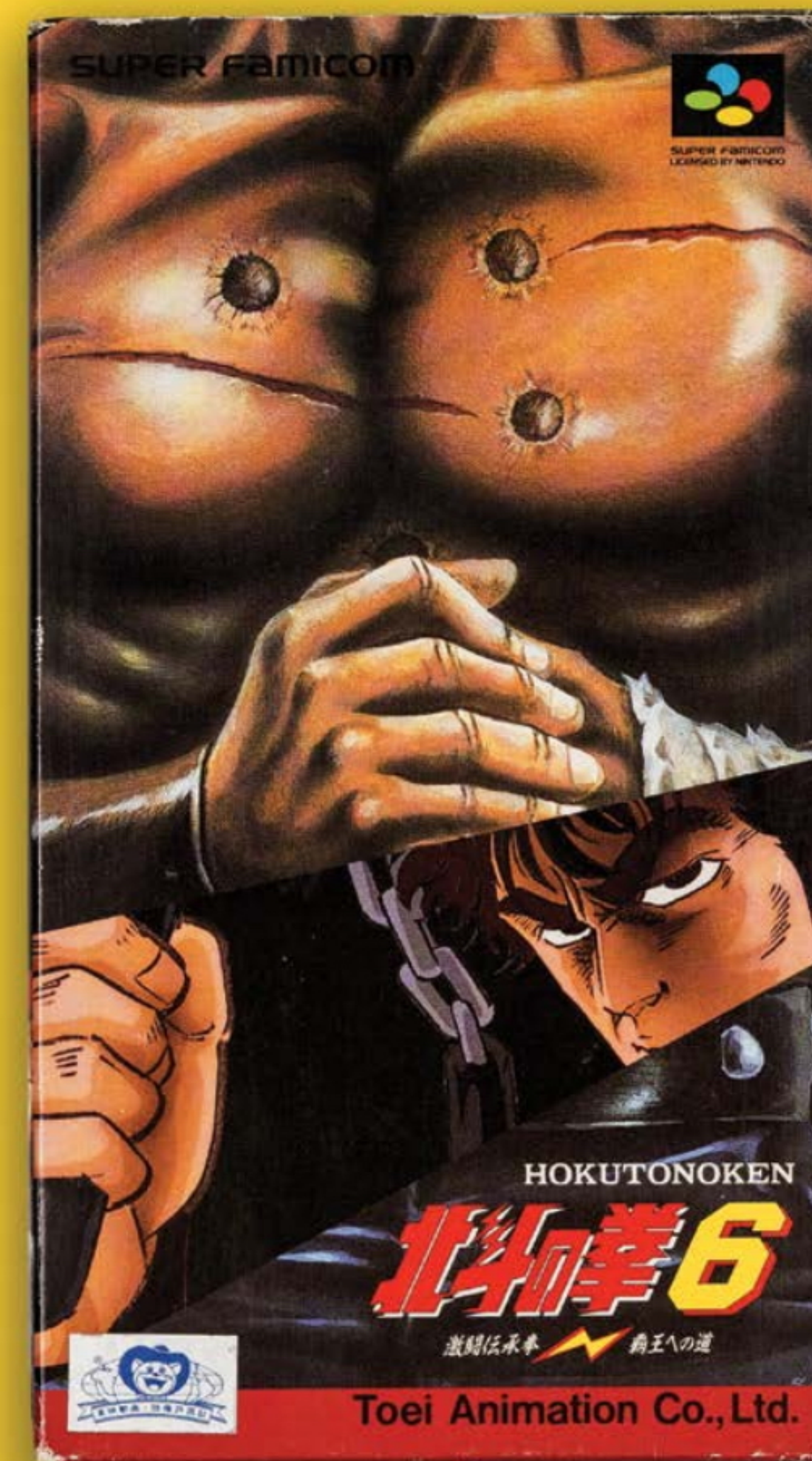
Bow Wow the dog is the sole star of Heisei Inu Monogatari Bow – Pop'n Smash!!'s cover, shown swinging his tennis racket in an attempt to smash the ball in his opponent's direction. Terry Yamamoto's artwork might not have global fame, but it's bold and eye-catching, making for a colourful cover.

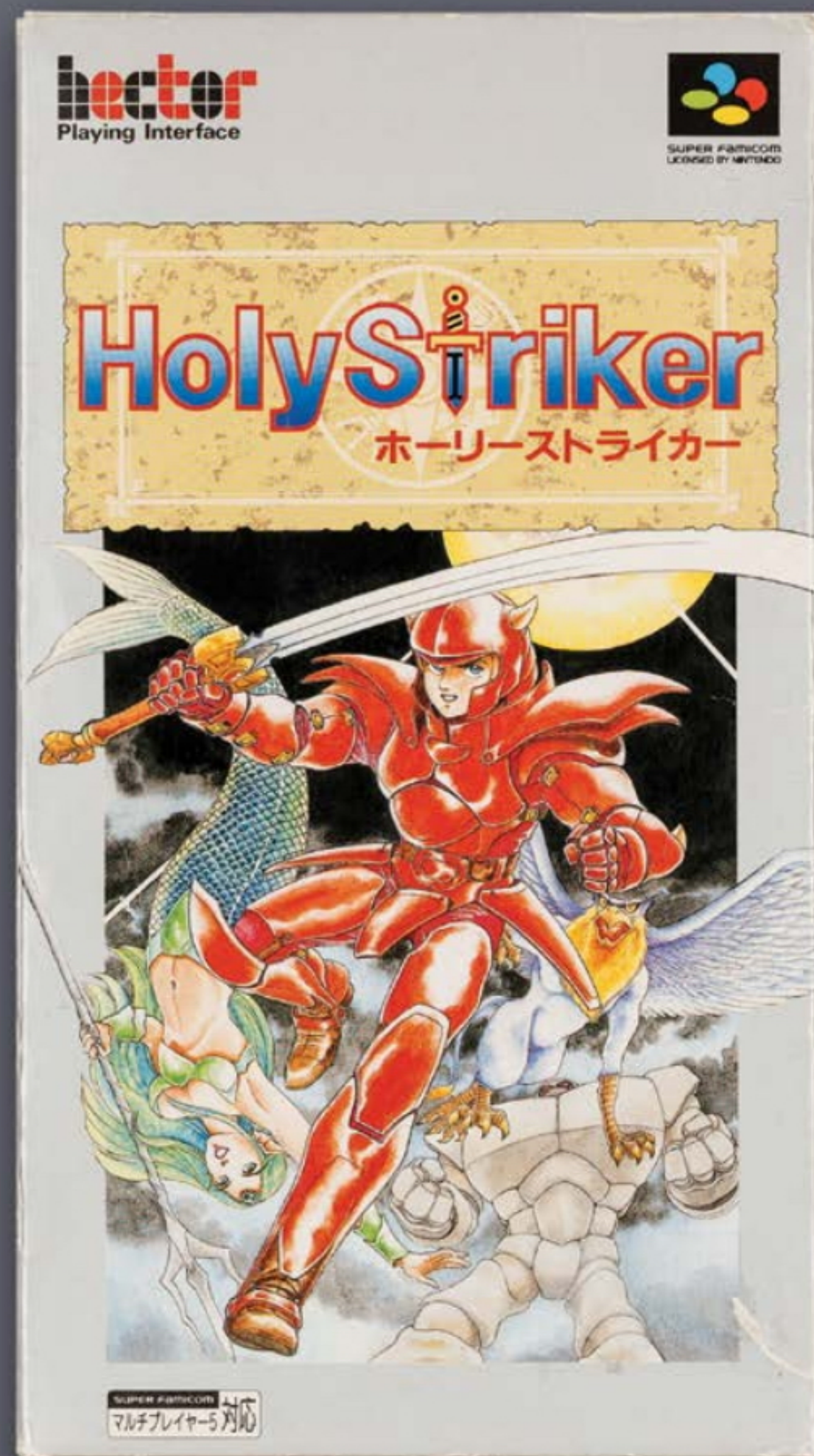
HOKUTO NO KEN 6 GEKTO DENSHŌKEN HŌ HE NO MICHİ

北斗の拳6 激闘伝承拳 覇王への道
SHOU EI SYSTEM /
TOEI ANIMATION (1992)
GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

Fist of the North Star 6: Fierce Battle Between Succeeding Fists – The Way of the Conqueror is the second Hokuto no Ken video game released by Toei Animation for the Super Famicom. Switching from its predecessor's RPG gameplay, this one-on-one fighter allows the player to choose from a selection of eight characters from the anime series. At the end of the 20th century a mass nuclear war wreaks devastation upon mankind; a resource-ravaged Earth is sent back to the dark ages, where savage gangs rule with violence and fear. Masters of the Hokuto, Nanto and Gento Kō Ken martial arts wage war against each clan in a bid to control the world and reign supreme.

The box art features the game's protagonist, Kenshiro, who in the manga series is known as the 'man with seven scars'. The wounds etched on his chest form the shape of the Big Dipper, which is also the symbol of the Hokuto school of martial arts of which Kenshiro is a master. His creator, manga artist Buronson (Yoshiyuki Okamura), has said that the character was based on Bruce Lee and Max Rockatansky from George Millar's Mad Max films. The imagery follows the art style used in Toei's feature-length anime from 1986.





HOLYSTRIKER

ホーリーストライカー

AXES ART AMUSE / HECTOR (1993)

GENRE: ARCADE

The arch mage Wylde has conquered the four kingdoms of the ancient world. The future of these kingdoms is at stake and the king calls upon his greatest warrior to help defeat Wylde and his legions of monsters. The player takes control of Slader, a FireStriker who holds the ability to attack foes with a special weapon: the Trialight, a bouncing energy ball. Released as Firestriker in the West, the game blends top-down Zelda RPG aesthetics with Breakout-styled gameplay for a unique and enjoyable action adventure.

HolyStriker's artwork, which is framed by a metallic silver surround, depicts Slader and a selection of the varied combatants he faces in his quest. More of the game's concept and character art can be discovered in the game's manual, a standout example of which is the double-page spread of the game map, displaying each of the four kingdoms and the foes defending each one.

HOSHI NO KIRBY 3

星のカービィ3

HAL LABORATORY / NINTENDO (1997)

GENRE: PLATFORM

Kirby of the Stars, or Kirby's Dream Land as it was known on the SNES, begins with Kirby and his good friend Goopy as they set out to do some fishing. Suddenly, the super villain Dark Matter appears and breaks the planet's rings. He then proceeds to possess various Dream Land inhabitants, including King Dedede. Kirby and Goopy recruit the help of Kne, Rick, Coo and new characters Nago, ChuChu and Pitch as they set out to defeat Dark Matter and his master, Zero. Like Super Mario RPG: Legend of the Seven Stars, the cartridge included an SA 1 accelerator chip to process the large number of bitmaps and special effects required by the game.

The charming box art takes Tetsuya Notoya's character design work and recreates it as a photographed collage. Paper and card of various grain and colour is cut out and meticulously layered to create an image of Kirby bounding along in an environment similar to the in-game graphics. The use of soft colours and textures forms a warm and gentle design, which sits perfectly in the Kirby universe that Masahiro Sakurai created.





HOSHI NO KIRBY SUPER DELUXE

星のカービィ スーパーデラックス
HAL LABORATORY / NINTENDO (1996)
GENRE VARIOUS

Kirby Super Deluxe features seven separate Kirby games and two mini games. 'The Arena' is essentially a boss rush mode, in which players are tasked with defeating each of the game's bosses in quick succession. 'Milky Way Wishes' is a nine-level game, containing platform gaming and scrolling shooting sections. 'Revenge of Meta Knight' puts Kirby in a mission to save Dream Land by defeating Meta Knight on board his battleship, the Halberd. 'The Great Cave Offensive' features Kirby exploring caves and unearthing treasures, some of which are themed around Zelda, Metroid and F-Zero. 'Gourmet Race' pits King DeDe against Kirby as they race each other while aiming to eat as much as possible along the way. 'Dyna Blade' is a four-level platform game culminating in a boss battle with a giant bird, and 'Spring Breeze' is an enhanced remake of Hoshi No Kirby, released for the Game Boy in 1992.

This beautifully understated design features a photographed wood burn brand or Yakisugi – a traditional Japanese method used for burning cedar to create designs or to accentuate its natural pattern. This Japanese design was used exclusively for the Super Famicom, with a gold star-themed illustration used for its release in the West.

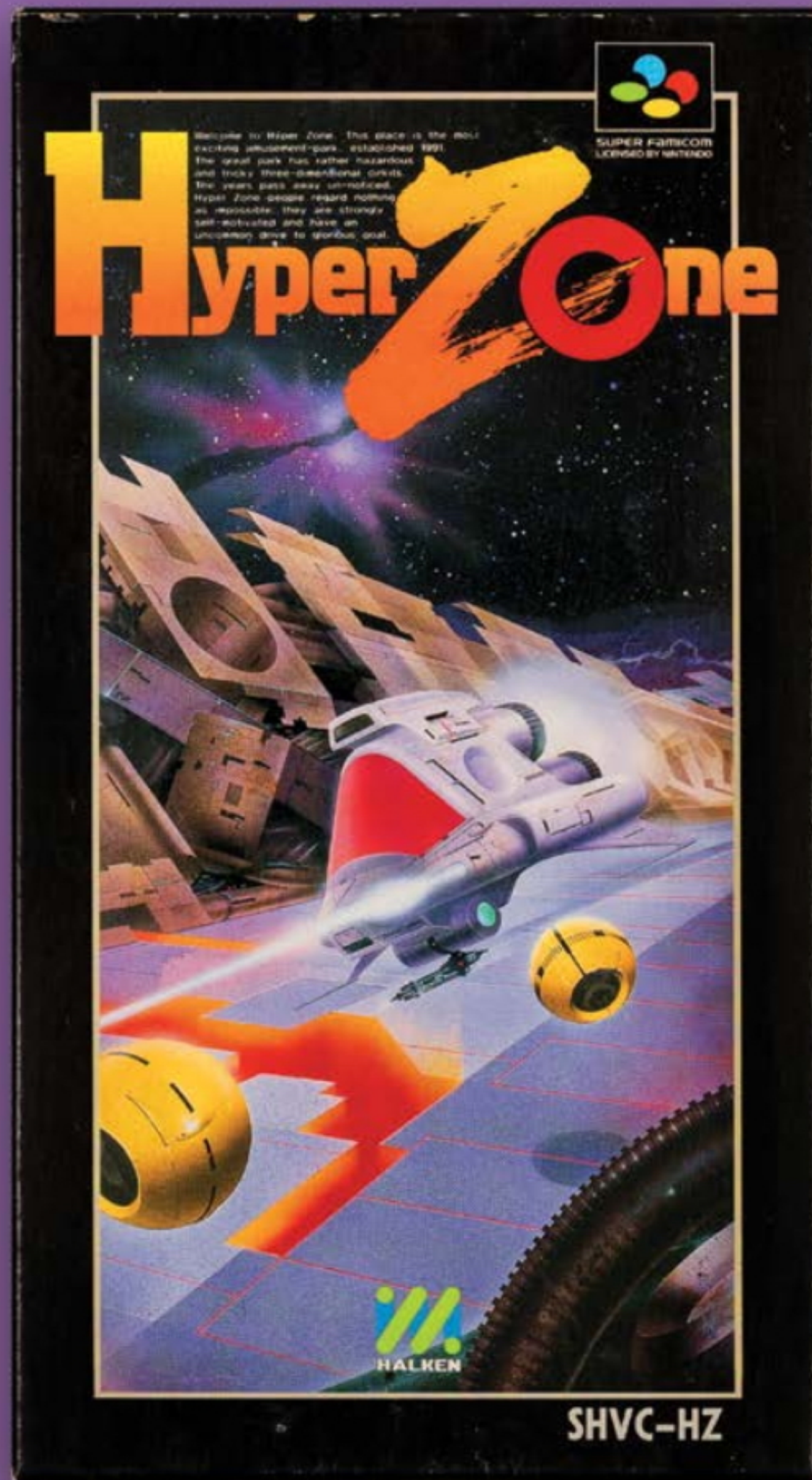
HYPER IRIA

ハイパーイリア
CROWD / ZERAM PROJECT /
BANPRESTO (1995)
GENRE PLATFORM SHOOTER

Loosely based on the anime series, Iria: Zeiram the Animation, this side-scrolling platform shooter stars the titular bounty hunter. The story begins as Iria, her older brother Glen and his partner Bob are sent on a rescue mission to the spaceship Karma, which has been hijacked by an alien life form named Zeiram. Glen and Bob are killed, and Iria now finds herself targeted by assassins working for Tedan Tippedai, the corporation that owned the Karma, and which aims to use Zeiram as a military bioweapon. Iria must track down and kill Zeiram before Tedan Tippedai captures him.

An illustration of Iria fills the box with some stylish logo work at the bottom. Darkness surrounds the central character, but within the black backdrop the face of Zeiram can be seen. It's a cool atmospheric and minimalist design with all emphasis placed on the hero, Iria.





HYPER ZONE

ハイパーゾーン

HAL LABORATORY / HALKEN (1991)

GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

Hyper Zone's plot centres around a lone space pilot who is tasked with exploring new planets suitable for colonisation. Earth is dying and the human race has spread across the solar system, desperate to find habitable worlds. Our character's job is to explore these hostile planets and clear the bio-mechanical aliens so the colony ships can secure each location. One of the first games available for the Super Famicom, Hyper Zone makes use of Mode 7 scrolling for a frantic, psychedelic, though somewhat short 3D shooter.

The Japanese box art for Hyper Zone features a naïve style that harks back to the early era of British computer game art of the 1980s. The airbrushed image is reminiscent of Mark J. Brady's paintings for Mastertronic games, which were in turn influenced by the work of Chris Foss. The illustration and logo has an alluring, Western-influenced sci-fi quality to it, making it a unique box for collectors of Japanese games.

IHATOVO MONOGATARI

イーハトーヴォ物語

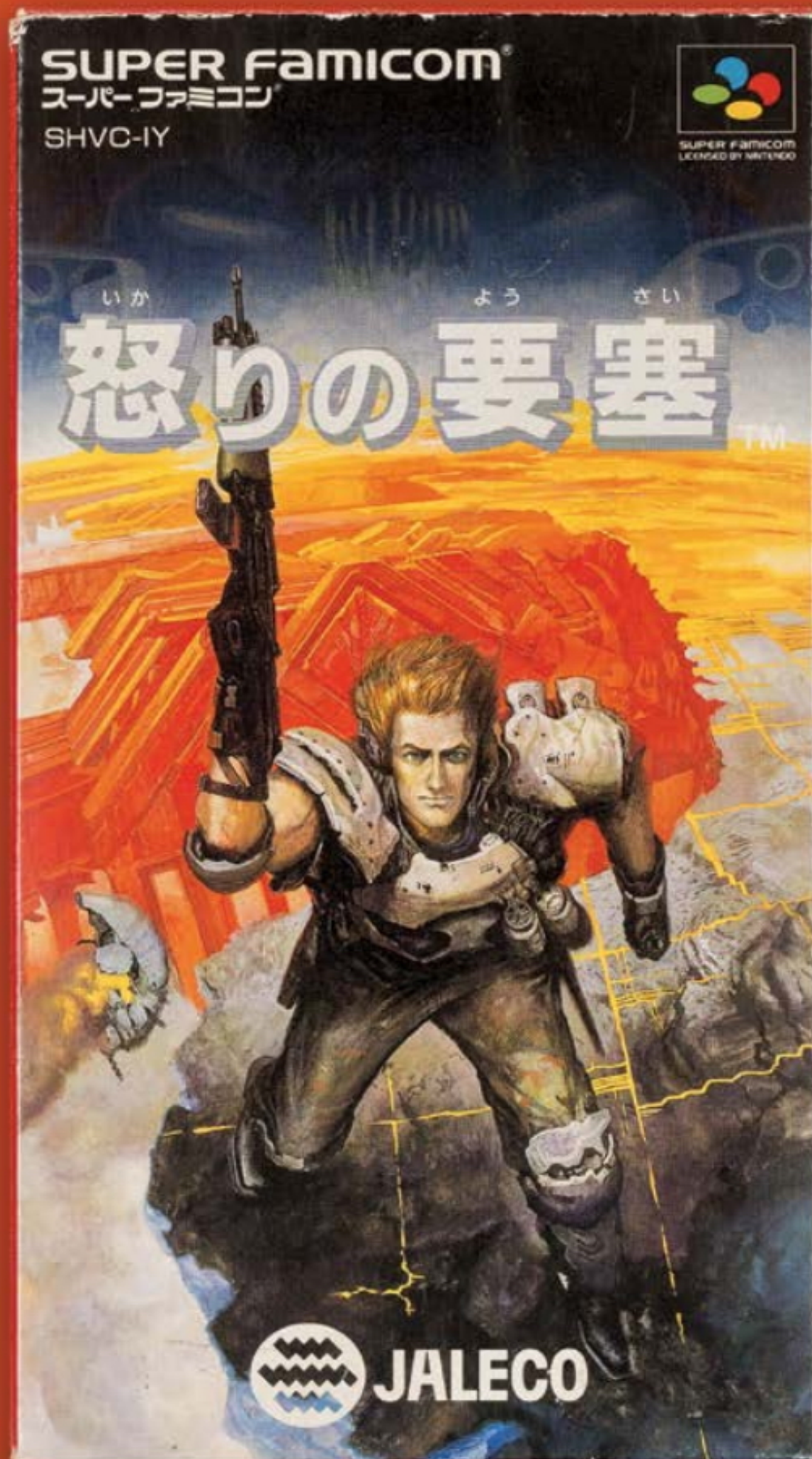
HECTOR (1993)

GENRE: ADVENTURE

Ihatovo Story is based on one of the most widely read literary figures in Japan, poet and children's author Miyazawa Kenji. Players must find and collect seven of Kenji's notebooks in the small, fictional town of Ihatovo. Each notebook helps to complete one of the author's stories, including The Fire Seashell, Ozbel and the Elephant, The Cat's Office, Night on the Galactic Railroad and Gauche the Cellist. Collect all seven books and a new chapter becomes available (closing all the areas opened in the previous one). Once the ninth chapter is complete, the player meets Miyazawa himself before returning to the real world on the Galaxy Express train. Ihatovo Story is a charming adventure, but fairly linear in structure and only takes a few hours to complete.

The box art features many characters from Kenji's stories and each is illustrated in a unique style that looks more 1960s European than Japanese. The manual also includes a fantastic range of drawings, sprite art and real-life locations that Kenji drew influence from. The game features excellent pixel art and a stunning soundtrack written by Tsukasa Tawada.





IKARI NO YŌSAI

怒りの要塞

K. K. DCE / JALECO (1993)

GENRE: TOP-DOWN SCROLLING SHOOTER

When contact is lost with a group of scientists working in the field of interdimensional physics, the only option is to send in a soldier who is more than human. Going under the code-name 'HIRO', the player character must infiltrate the research facility and deal with a mind-boggling assortment of monsters, robots and other enemies while finding and securing the scientists trapped within. Ikari no Yōsai – which translates as The Fortress of Fury – adopts a top-down perspective similar to that seen in its forerunner on the Game Boy, which has the same title but an entirely different plot. The series also includes a second Game Boy outing, not released globally. The Super Famicom Ikari no Yōsai was localised as Operation Logic Bomb in North America.

In this high-concept artwork, cybernetically-enhanced super-soldier HIRO stands ready for action, rifle held aloft, as the ground crumbles beneath his feet. A burning enemy robot falls into the chasm, no doubt the recipient of HIRO's wrath. Ominously, a massive monster lurks at the top of the image, suggesting that a sterner test awaits our hero.

INDIANA JONES' GREATEST ADVENTURES

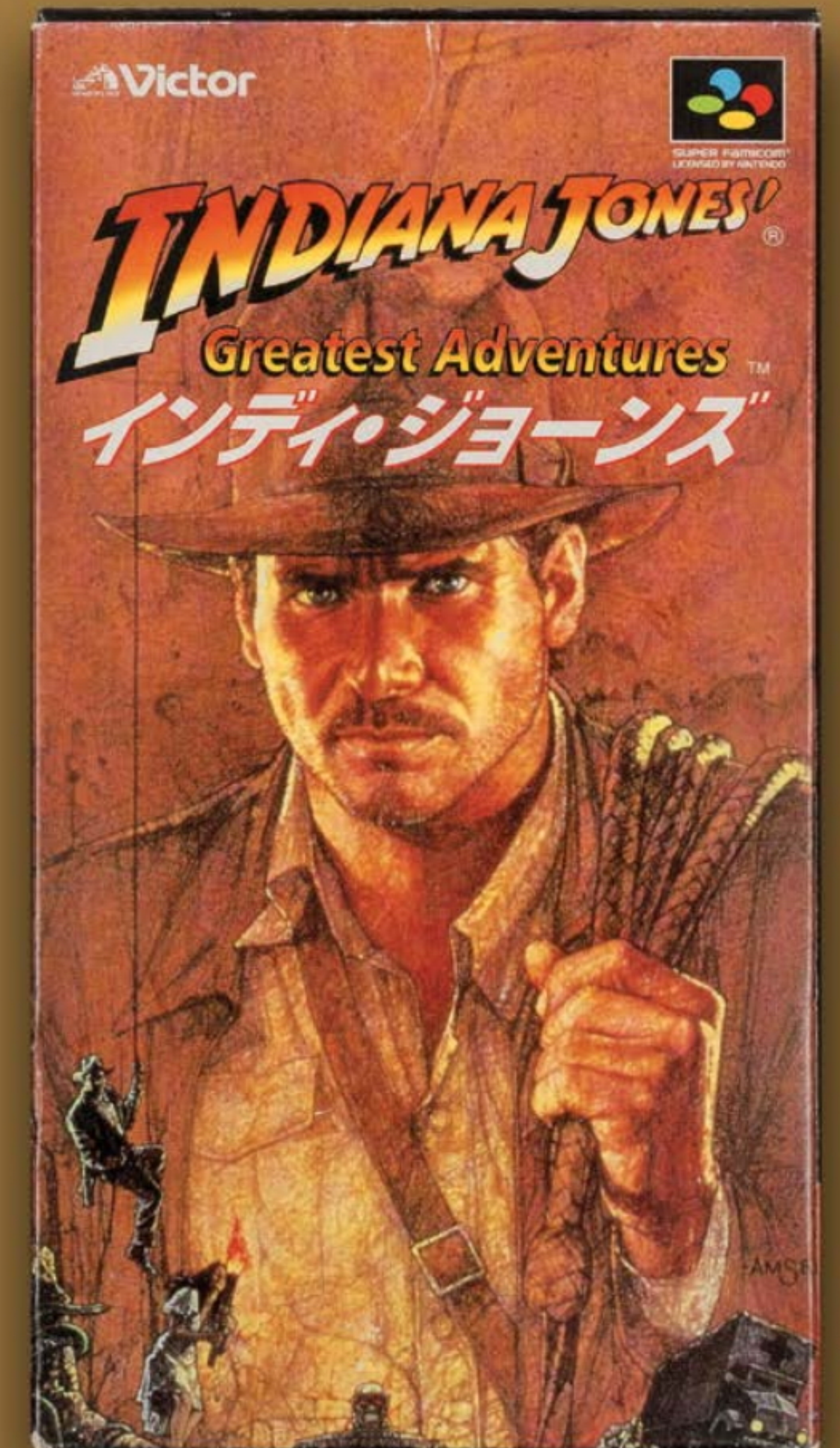
インディ・ジョーンズ

IACTOR 5 / LUCASARTS / VICTOR (1995)

GENRE: PLATFORM ACTION

Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures is a video game adaptation of Raiders of the Lost Ark, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom and Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade. The player takes control of a whip-cracking, pistol-toting Indy as he explores various key sequences from the film franchise, complete with voice samples and images taken directly from the movies. It's also something of a graphical showcase for the console, with lots of multilayer parallax scrolling and snazzy Mode 7 effects.

The box artwork is taken directly from Richard Amsel's original poster illustration that was commissioned for the release of Raiders of the Lost Ark. Amsel is a celebrated American motion picture artist, with many film posters to his name, including The Dark Crystal, Flash Gordon, The Champ, Chinatown, The Last Picture Show and The Sting. Amsel's work drew global recognition and his distinctive style has influenced generations of illustrators and designers. This iconic piece of movie art has several small key scenes added to the bottom of the portrait, as well as a smaller version of Indiana dangling from the letter 'I'.





IRON COMMANDO KÔTETSU NO SENSHI

鋼鉄の戦士 アイアンコマンドー
ARCADE ZONE / POPPO (1995)
GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

The action in Iron Commando: Steel Warrior kicks off with a meteorite strike on Earth. Chaos descends as the terrorist group G.H.O.S.T. races to retrieve the radioactive material in order to harness its powers and create a weapon that will transform the human race into mutants. And so the Iron Commando field team is called to the Rescue. Taking the role of either Marine Jack or Kung-Fu Master Chang Li, you're tasked with battling through ten different zones – from gritty urban settings, through forests and a temple, to an industrial military complex – as they grapple with G.H.O.S.T. henchmen. The traditional two-player beat 'em up action is bolstered with knives, shotguns, machine guns and grenades.

A simplistic watercolour painting has Jack and Chang Li pursued by mutant creatures from G.H.O.S.T. Despite its awkward perspective and anatomical proportions, Iron Commando's in-game content and rarity has made it one of the most collectible titles for the Super Famicom. It features gameplay that's very similar to Capcom's Cadillac and Dinosaurs.

JAKI CRUSH

ナグザットスーパーピンボール 邪鬼破壊
NAXAT SOFT (1992)
GENRE: PINBALL

This pinball game takes its name and influences from Japanese folklore and Mythology. 'Jaki' is commonly referred to in Japanese as an evil energy, which can take the form of demons or spirits. In Jaki Crush, players aim to achieve high scores by getting multiple points, unlocking additional sections and defeating mini boss stages, all of which take place on a vertically-scrolling three-screen pinball table. As well as traditional pinball flippers and bumpers, the game also includes roaming enemies, ball upgrades and hidden bonus stages. This is the third outing for the Pinball series by Naxat, with Devil's Crush and Alien Crush previously released on the PC Engine.

The dramatic box art features a large illustration of the game's main boss, depicted as a Japanese Oni mask-wearing demon, while movement is implied by swirling tracks of flame placed against a close-up of some of the pinball table's components. Sadly the impact of the jagged logo is reduced by the inclusion of 'Jaki Crush' in English in an unattractive slab-serif font. However this third installment of the Naxat pinball series uses cover art that's a marked improvement over the previous cover designs used for Devil's Crush and Alien Crush, which are colourful, cartoony and somewhat amateur in quality.





JIKKYŌ OSHABERI PARODIUS

実況おしゃべりパロディウス
KONAMI (1995)
GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

Translated as 'Chatting Parodius', this third and final Parodius game for the Super Famicom has players flying through more surreal and comedic situations with many Konami games parodied along the way. Having selected from an array of 16 characters, each with different weaponry and power-ups, the player battles across a variety of increasingly weird landscapes – although the shoot 'em up action is still very much in the Gradius vein. A game show host-style voiceover narrates the action, providing information about your progress and enemies being faced. This was the first Parodius title developed specifically for the Super Famicom; its success led to further ports for the Sega Saturn and Sony PlayStation entitled Jikkyō Oshaberi Parodius – Forever With Me.

Jikkyō Oshaberi Parodius' cover features a selection of its playable characters, including Vic Viper from Gradius, Lord British from Salamander and Pentarō, son of Penta from Arctic Adventure. The pseudo-3D embossed logo is flanked by little megaphones, representing the 'chatting' element of the game. These megaphones are also used as weapons during play, with random phrases spelled out to destroy enemies in their path.

JIKKYŌ POWERFUL PRO YAKYŪ 3

実況パワフルプロ野球3
DIAMOND HEAD PRODUCTION /
KONAMI (1996)
GENRE: SPORTS

The third entry in Konami's super-deformed Jikkyō Powerful Pro baseball series, Jikkyō Powerful Pro Yakyū 3's most notable contribution to the genre is the introduction of an RPG-style career mode, dubbed 'Success' mode. Starting out as a fictional player, the objective is to turn your avatar into a baseball superstar by focusing on training and making the right career choices. Outside of the Success mode, players are given access to a wide range of customisation options, as well as traditional elements such as batting, pitching and fielding training and practice games.

The unmistakable chibi character style, which has made the series so famous, is present and correct on the cover of Jikkyō Powerful Pro Yakyū 3. The art style abandons realism in favour of cute, big-eyed players with stumpy limbs and massive heads, and has been retained all the way up to the present day, with recent outings on PlayStation 3 and Nintendo Wii.





JIKKYŌ WORLD SOCCER – PERFECT ELEVEN

実況おしゃべりパロディウス
KONAMI (1994)
GENRE: SPORT

Released in the West as International Superstar Soccer, this football classic from Konami broke the soccer gaming mould and set a precedent that football games to this day still follow. Its innovative use of side-scrolling action, dribbling, lobs, sliding tackles and diversified players set a new standard in video game sports and led to three versions for the Super Nintendo. It also featured Konami's 'Response Sound System', delivering audio commentary via a dedicated sound chip – a feature which would be used on later games such as Jikkyō Oshaberi Parodius.

The Japanese release features pastel art by an uncredited illustrator. A sense of dynamism is created by vertical strokes on the canvas, creating the effect of motion blur. The energy and tension in the piece is heightened by the use of vibrant flecks of colour to depict an enthusiastic crowd.

JIKKYŌ WORLD SOCCER 2 – FIGHTING ELEVEN

実況ワールドサッカー2
ファイティング イレブン
KONAMI (1994)
GENRE: SPORT

Before Pro Evolution Soccer there was Jikkyō World Soccer, the series which began Konami's epic assault on the sports genre. The follow-up to 1994's Jikkyō World Soccer: Perfect Eleven boasts international teams, a crowd which responds to the on-pitch action, extensive audio commentary and – most importantly – incredibly deep and involving gameplay. Innovations introduced in the previous game – such as the sprint button – are joined by even tighter controls, co-op play, better AI and even more lines of audio commentary. Released in the West as International Superstar Soccer Deluxe, it was a tremendous global success as well as being a hit in its native Japan.

The dynamic cover image for Jikkyō World Soccer 2: Fighting Eleven does an excellent job of capturing the excitement of soccer as a sport, showing an Italian player deftly leaping over a sliding challenge from a Brazilian opponent. The same artwork was used for the Western release of International Superstar Soccer Deluxe.





JUSTICE LEAGUE TASK FORCE

ジャスティスリーグ
BLIZZARD / SUNSOFT /
ACCLAIM (1995)
GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

Following reports of super villain Darkseid attacking planet Earth, the Justice League Task Force leaps into action. In Story mode, the player selects one of the six members of the Justice League: Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Green Arrow, The Flash, and Aquaman. You then head off to track down the other members for information, only to be attacked on sight by their cybernetic clones. You need to dispatch the fake Justice League, take on Darkseid's henchmen and then defeat your own clone in combat before fighting Darkseid himself.

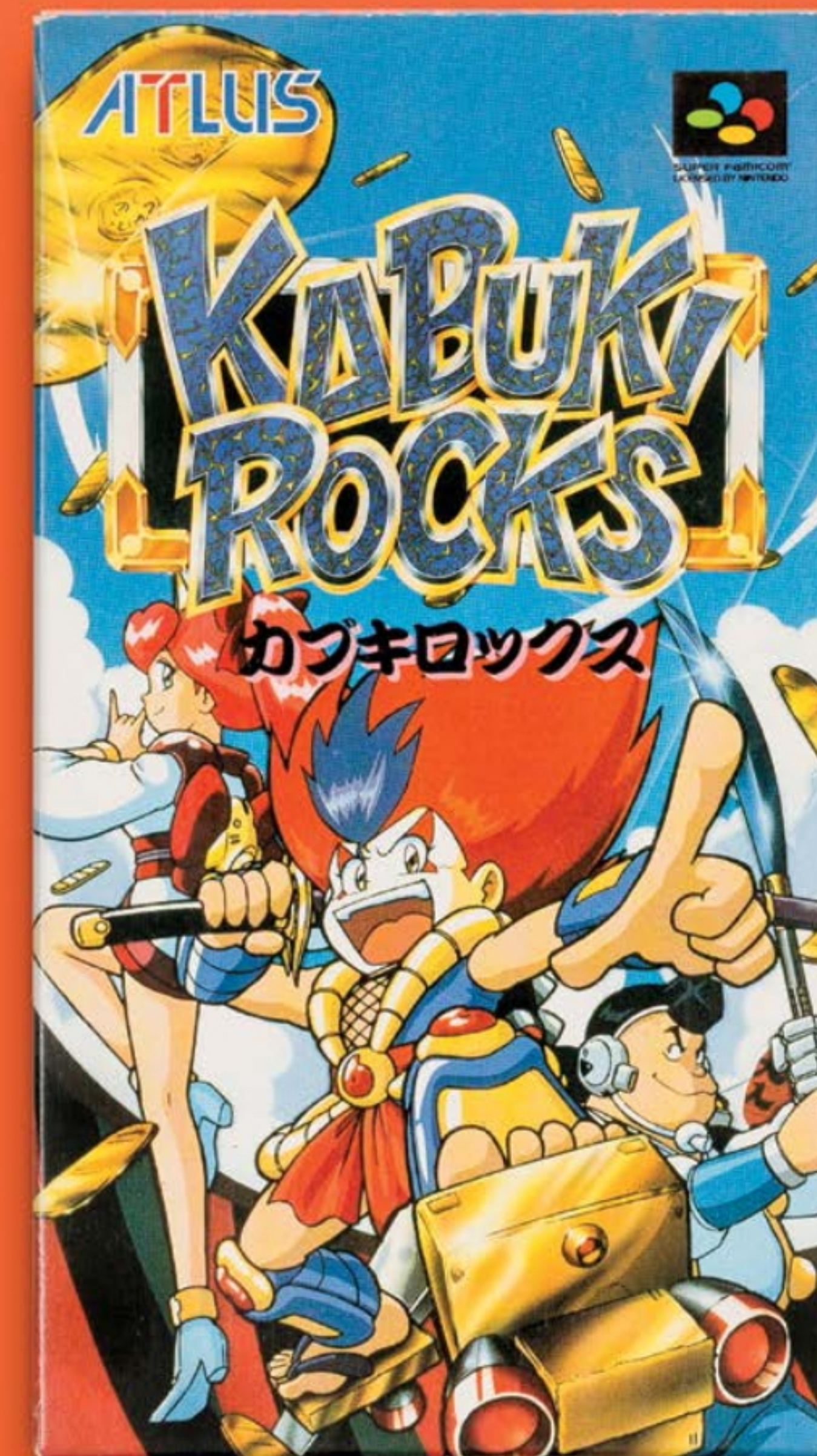
The monthly Justice League Task Force comic book series ran for three years, beginning in 1993. D.C and Marvel artist, Sal Velluto provided the cover art for the game as well as penciling 22 issues of the comic series. His heavy contrast and stylised shading gives his art a late-'70s comic book feel, particularly with the retro hairstyles on Superman and Aqua Man.

KABUKI ROCKS

カブキロックス
RED / ATLUS (1994)
GENRE: RPG

The people of Dako planet are enjoying a peaceful and tranquil existence until the new Shogun takes over! Monsters run riot, music is banned and people live a life of misery. The game stars Rock, McKee and Bencki, three Kabuki theatre musicians who, with the help of genius inventor Jingoro, travel to each of the world's seven dimensions to combat the marauding evildoers. They must practice karaoke and learn new musical skills so they can fight to free the people of Dako from the Shogun and bring music back to the land.

Rock, McKee and Bencki are displayed on the box as they strike a combative pose. A cartoon style is employed with vivid hues, exaggerated perspective and strong line art producing a pleasing composition. The golden coins floating in the air represent the game's currency, which is earned by defeating the roving enemies in combat. Kabuki Rocks' sprawling manual also contains illustrations of the game's characters, worlds, weapons and musical instruments. A bright pink Edo-era floral pattern is used on the reverse to complete what is a well-presented and detailed visual companion to the game. Kennosuke Mizutani is credited with the character design.





KAMEN RIDER

仮面ライダー

SUN L / BANDAI (1993)

GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

Kamen Rider is based on the 1970s-era tokusatsu (special effects-heavy) TV series of the same name, created by manga artist Shotaro Ishinomori. Players assume the role of Takeshi Hongo as he fights to defeat the terror network known as Shocker. The game can also be played co-operatively with another player who takes control of Hayato Ichimonji, the second Kamen Rider. Players must transform into their super-charged Kamen Rider personas to deliver the final blow when battling with bosses.

Kamen Rider has been a hugely popular Japanese television series, with various remakes, sequels and spin-offs spanning more than 35 years. This homage to the original show is great fan service and it's done with respect to the original source material. The box art features the original '70s logo and a stylised image of Hongo as he strikes his famous pose.

KAMEN RIDER SD BATTLE - MACHINE RIDERS

仮面ライダーSD 出撃!!ライダーマシン

YUTAKA / BANDAI (1993)

GENRE: RACING / COMBAT

Kamen Rider Super Deformed Battle is based on the 1990 manga and features super deformed versions of the various Kamen Riders from each iteration of the franchise. The game is the equivalent of a fast-paced scrolling beat 'em up on bikes, with the action split over ten chapters with three levels in each. After each stage you get to choose which special weapons to take into the next. Each of the ten riders also has a unique ability, such as fireballs or invisibility, which need to be used strategically, especially during boss battles.

The box artwork comes directly from the manga with all ten of the game's masked riders surrounding the logo on their miniature bikes. The speed-blurred lines in the backdrop provide a sense of dynamism and the vivid colours make this an appealing package. Kamen Rider SD Battle is a highlight of what would be one of many SD games for the Super Famicom.



KAT'S RUN – ZEN NIHON K CAR SENSHUKEN

キャッツ・ラン 全日本Kカー選手権
ATLUS (1995)
GENRE: RACING



This driving game from Atlus features players racing in sport edition 'K cars' or Kei cars – a Japanese category of small vehicles, including miniature cars, micro vans, and micro pickup trucks. Vehicles include the Autozam AZ-1, Honda Today, Honda Beat, Suzuki Cappuccino, Alto Works, Suzuki Jimny, Suzuki Wagon R, Mitsubishi Minica Dangan ZZ4, Mitsubishi Toppo and the Daihatsu Mira TR-XX. The game employs Mario Kart-style Mode 7 courses, with tracks set in the city, desert, countryside and snowy wastes.

Kat's Run features a landscape box saturated with pinks, making it an incredibly eye-catching design. All of the game's licensed cars are displayed against a pink chequerboard backdrop with the playable characters positioned against a fluorescent pink stripe. The manual also contains a wide range of character detail, all of which is executed with technical flair and style that could be mistaken for an anime series.

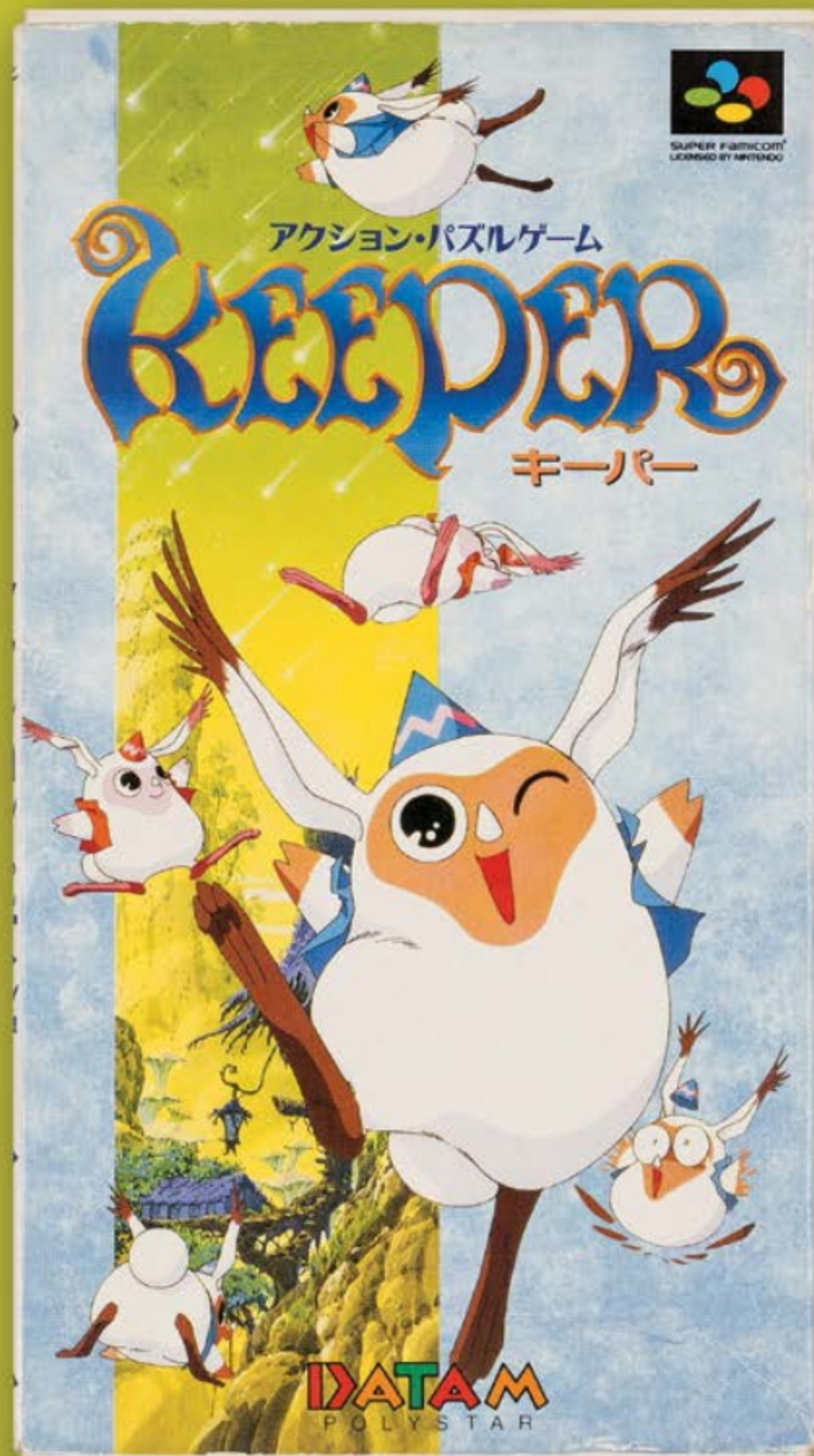
KAWA NO NUSHI TSURI 2

川のぬし釣り2
YUU YUU / PACK IN VIDEO (1995)
GENRE: RPG / FISHING



The River King series started on the Famicom in 1990, with this direct sequel following five years later. Here the fishing sim genre is turned on its head by altering the game's format into an RPG, making it look and feel more like a Zelda title with its NPCs, random turn-based attacks, top-down perspective and equipment to add to your inventory. Players can choose between four family members and must explore the vast map in order to find the greatest fish, upgrading their equipment along the way.

In a clever marketing ploy, the makers of Kawa No Nushi Tsuru 2 have created a double-sided box that contains two covers and no reverse with screenshots. Instead, we have one side that appeals to RPG fans (pictured), with its family-themed image of our four playable characters, while on the reverse we have a design more in line with a fishing simulator – a photo-realistic painting of a fish bursting out of the water. The manual itself is a work of art, with endless illustrations of fish species, fishing equipment, characters and locations.



KEEPER

キーパー

RUPAC / ASCII / SUCCESS /
DATAM POLYSTAR (1994)
GENRE: PUZZLE

In Keeper we play as either Pikuru or Kintoto, two mythical creatures that live a secretive life in the woodlands of Japan. This puzzle game requires players to move coloured fossil stones around a grid, in a format akin to Sokoban combined with Tetris. Matching patterns and letters causes the blocks to disappear, and once the grid is clear you move on to the next. The game features a Story mode, a Puzzle mode with 60 levels, and a two-player mode with both co-operative and competitive play. Originally made for the Sharp X68000 computer, Keeper was ported to the Super Famicom a year later and the PlayStation in 2002.

This attractive box art places Pikuru and Kintoto in front of a blue backdrop, representing the water springs they must protect. A thin vertical stripe reveals their secret world beyond, with its saturated lime green image of mountains, trees and shooting stars, and the logo has been Romanised in a typically Western fantasy art style. Keeper is an obscure puzzle game that was released in low quantities and is often overlooked by puzzle fans, despite being well regarded on release. The character designs are by Hideki Tamura.

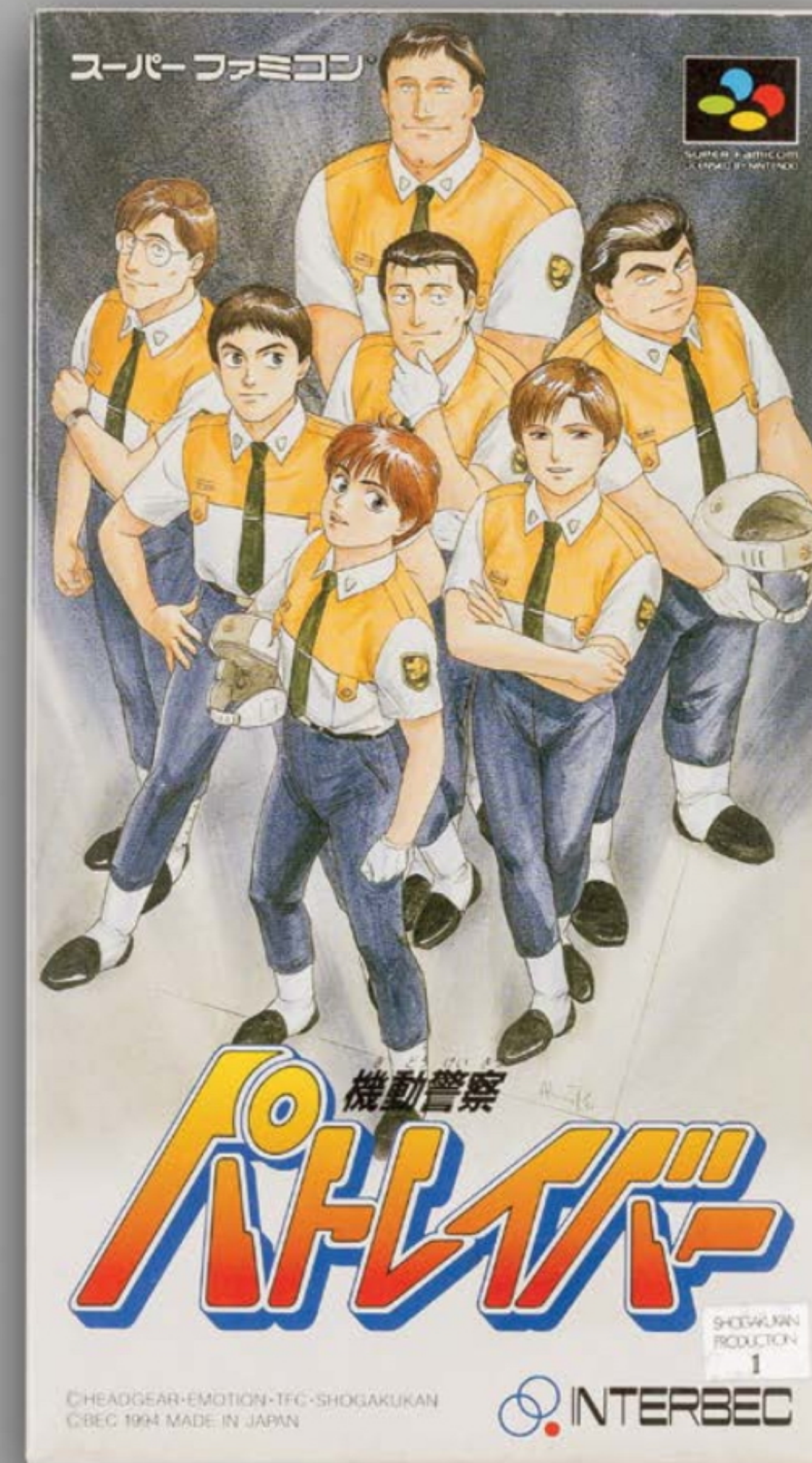
KIDŌ KEISATSU PATLABOR

機動警察パトレイバー

HEADGEAR / EMOTION /
TFC / SHOGAKUKAN /
BEC / INTERBEC (1994)
GENRE: ADVENTURE / STRATEGY

Mobile Police Patlabor, the sci-fi manga and anime series from creators Headgear, makes its debut on the Super Famicom in the form of an RPG strategy game. The year is 2001; Japan's advances in robotic engineering have revolutionised the country's industry with giant robots known as Labors providing city construction. Tokyo quickly grows into a sprawling metropolis, crammed with citizens, Labors, and a growing threat of organised crime and domestic terrorism, which aims to exploit the Labor robots for their own nefarious needs. The Tokyo Metropolitan Police Dept. establishes the Patlabor unit, a crack team of police officers complete with their own weaponised Labor robots. The crime-fighting team, led by Captain Gotoh, dispatch their units across the capital and fight toe-to-toe with the criminal underworld.

Akemi Takada's subtle artwork features the playable characters from Division 2 Mobile Police Squadron. Captain Gotoh stands with his crew in a candid scene that depicts them posing for a team photograph. Pilots Uzumi and Otha appear with support members Shinusi and Kumagami, while the gentle giant Yamasaki, nicknamed 'tall guy', stands head and shoulders above the rest.





KIDŌ SENSHI V GUNDAM

機動戦士Vガンダム
TOSE / BANDAI (1994)
GENRE: SCROLLING COMBAT

Mobile Suit V Gundam is based on the Japanese anime TV series of the same name (the 'V' stands for Victory). It takes place in the year UC 0153 and the Earth Federation is struggling to maintain control over the planet. The Zanscare Empire has launched another attack with its military arm, codenamed BESPA, and only a ragtag resistance movement named League Militaire stands in BESPA's way. The game's protagonists, teenagers Uso Ewin and his childhood friend Shakti Kareen, join the League and fight back at BESPA and the Zanscare Empire. The action takes place over 12 combat missions, but with clunky controls and a two-hour playtime, this one is only for the most hardened of Gundam completists.

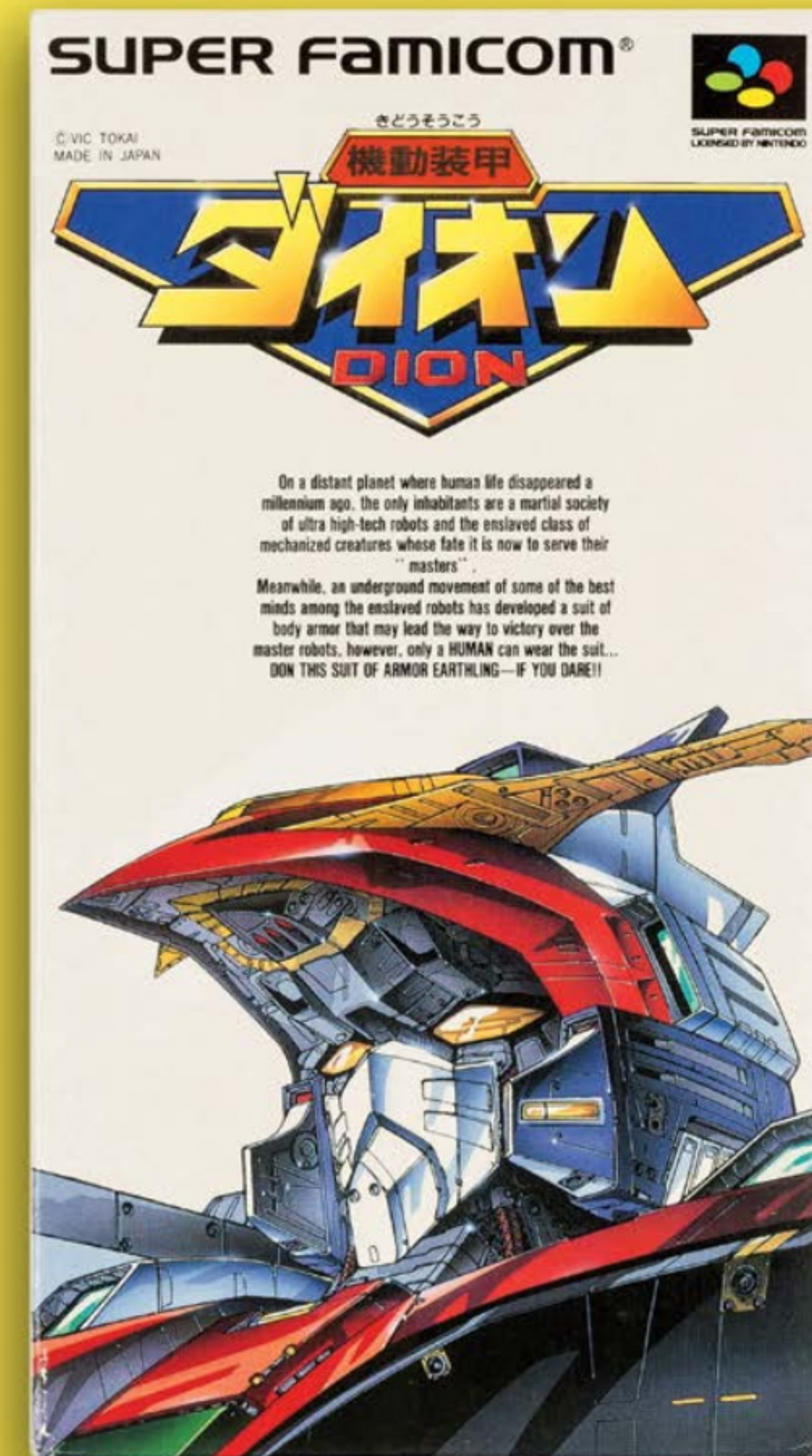
This composite of different illustrations has Uso and Shakti watching as two mechs fight in orbit high above the Earth's atmosphere. The artwork and logo mirror the anime series, making the game instantly identifiable amongst fans of the show and Bandai franchise. It's a well-executed design containing plenty of action and suspense – unlike the game inside.

KIDŌ SOKŌ DION

機動装甲ダイオン
JORUDAN / VIC TOKAI (1992)
GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

Known as Imperium on the Super Nintendo, Mobile Armour Dion's story takes place in 2027. Following a robot invasion of Earth, which leaves the human race on the brink of annihilation, an underground group of enslaved robots revolt against their masters by developing a small but highly manoeuvrable flying mech suit. Codenamed 'Dion', this agile but heavily armed device can only be operated by a human, and you play as one of the few remaining people left alive. The resistance launches Dion directly into enemy territory in a last-ditch attempt to destroy the ruling race, free the enslaved robots and rescue the human race from extinction.

Dion's hyper-detailed cover is illustrated by Goro Murata, a mech designer and artist who worked on several anime series, including Sakura Wars, Transformers: Armada and Cyborg 009. Murata's detail, sleek shading and angular lines are emphasised by contrasting his illustration against a simple white backdrop. Executed with technical flair and containing a style that's very much in line with classic '90s mech design, Murata's illustration leans heavily towards the Gundam design of the same era. Interestingly, Tokai chose to display a description of the game in English and position it directly above the artwork, most likely as a move to add a more exotic tone to the design.





KIKI KAIKAI: NAZO NO KURO MANTO

奇々怪界～謎の黒マント
NATSUME (1992)
GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

The game follows the adventures of shinto shrine maiden, Sayo-Chan and her tanuki sidekick, Manuke, who was once her enemy in the original Kiki Kaiki arcade game. Sayo-Chan and Manuke must team up and fight their way through waves of supernatural Yokai in order to defeat their puppet master, the mysterious Black Mantle. Many of Kiki Kaikai's characters are based on Japanese mythology and the game takes place in a feudal-era Japan.

Tanuki and Sayo-chan stand at the steps of a shrine entrance, with Sayo-Chan holding her trusty weapons: her supply of o-fuda scrolls and Goei wand. Tanuki looks upwards as the game's head villain, the Black Mantle, towers above them. Flames surround our heroes and storm clouds gather. The spooky supernatural theme is softened with the illustration's cartoonish flavour, and despite the dangers that they both face, Sayo-Chan's friendly smile and stance suggest a positive attitude and determination to defeat the evil spirits. It's a gentle illustration with plenty of fun and personality that mirrors the game's content perfectly.

KING OF DRAGONS

ザ・キングオブドラゴンズ
CAPCOM (1994)
GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

This medieval scrolling fighter from Capcom combines Western mythology with swords and sorcery. The game features five playable characters: Elf, Wizard, Fighter, Cleric and Dwarf, and our heroes must defend the kingdom of Malus from the invading monsters, led by the red dragon, Gildiss. Each level takes place across the Kingdom's vast map and battles are set within castles, forests, caves and ships. Weaponry can be enhanced with the aid of power-ups and a two-player mode is included.

The Super Famicom box uses the original arcade flyer art from 1991. Each of the game's five heroes are pictured on the cover as they battle with Gildiss, his flames engulfing the foreground as the fighter and dwarf shield themselves from their force. The logo's regal polished gold font is contrasted by a chiseled 3D typeface of baked earth, echoing the game's clash of species, men versus dragons.





KING OF THE MONSTERS

キング・オブ・ザ・モンスターズ
SNK / TAKARA AMUSEMENT (1992)
GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

This port of the Neo-Geo classic pits giant monsters against each other as they battle it out across Tokyo, Kyoto, Kobe, Osaka, Okayama and Hiroshima. Each character is loosely based on a tokusatsu kaiju (Japanese monster movie character). Players choose from four such characters: Geon, Beetle Mania, Astro Guy or Rocky. Each of the environments can be destroyed during battle and players can pick up helicopters, boats and tanks and use them as projectiles.

Our four fighters are pictured together with the original Neo-Geo logo placed above them. This artwork was unique to the Super Famicom, with different cover art commissioned for the Mega Drive and Neo-Geo. This design pales in comparison with its sequel's cover, but it is a cult classic of the 1990s nonetheless.

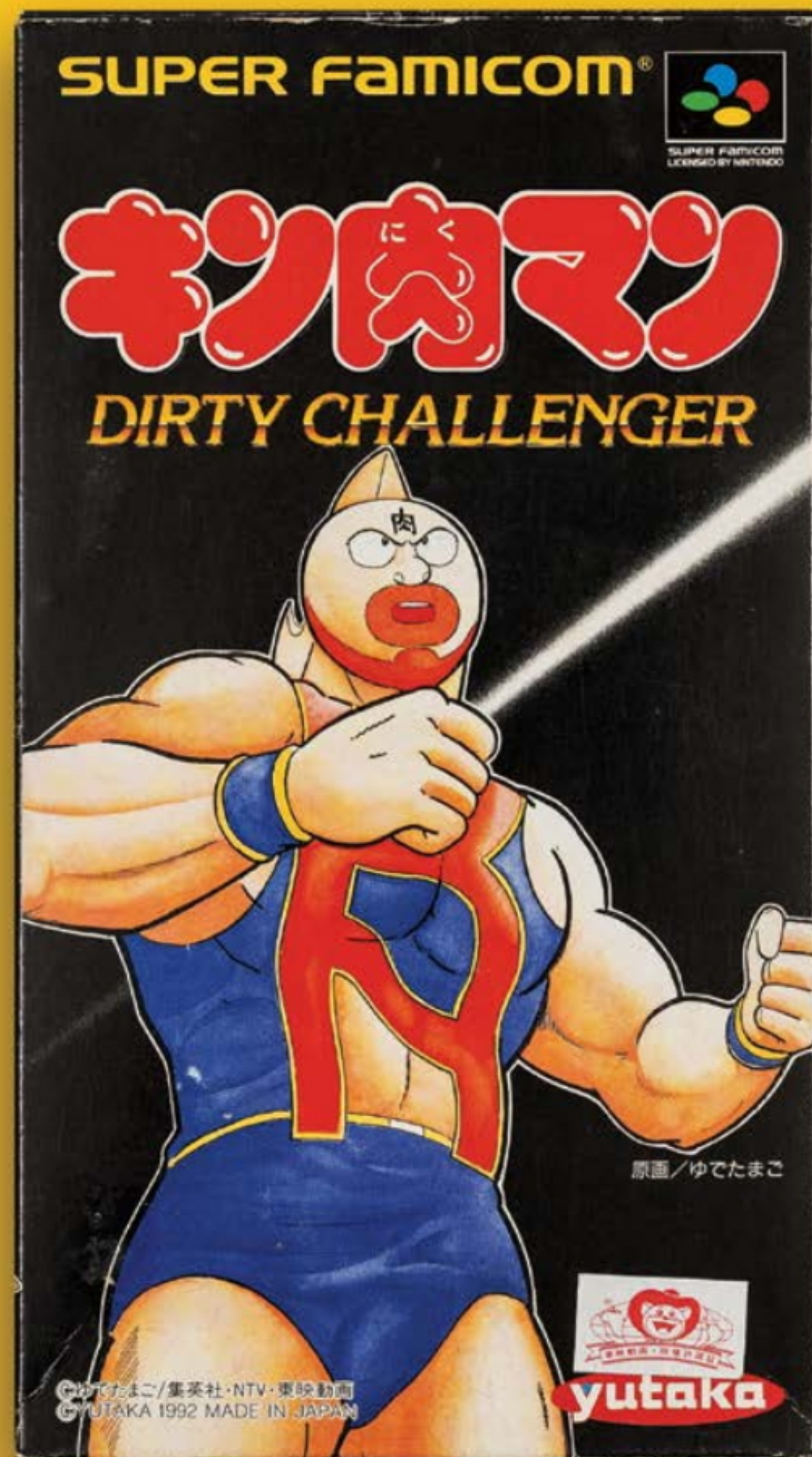
KING OF THE MONSTERS 2 – THE NEXT THING

キング・オブ・ザ・モンスターズ2
SNK / TAKARA AMUSEMENT (1993)
GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

Geon, Woo and Atomic Guy return to defend the world from the threat of a new enemy, the evil alien Famardy. This time our heroes are upgraded in true tokusatsu style and are renamed to Super Geon, Cyber Woo and Atomic Guy in this kaiju-influenced fight fest. Battles take place across the globe in countries including France and America, and a new range of foes lie in wait – from the Sack Eyes, Yama a Mordon and Huge Keal to Eat Wow, Kili Kili, Horn du Out and the game's master villain, King Famardy.

SNK's resident artist Toshiaki Mori (aka Shinkiro) provides this excellent artwork and places Atomic Guy at the centre as he's flanked by Cyber Woo and Super Geon. Each character is rendered with watercolours and airbrush while gold metallic ink is used to frame the artwork.





KINNIKUMAN: DIRTY CHALLENGER

キン肉マン DIRT CHALLENGER
YUTAKA (1992)
GENRE: WRESTLING

This wrestling game is based on the 1979 manga series, Kinnikuman (Muscle Man) by Takashi Shimada and Yoshinori Nakai. It stars Suguru Kinniku, a superhuman character from the planet Kinniku, who's competing in a tournament to retain his title as prince. Kinnikuman was originally created as a parody of Ultraman and is better known in the west as part of the M.U.S.C.L.E. toy figure series or Kinkeshi as they were known in Japan. The game takes place during the Tournament of the Kinniku People and players choose from six different contenders who are all competing for the crown. The roster comprises Kinnikuman Soldier, Kinnikuman, Kinnikuman Mariposa, Kinnikuman Super Phoenix, Kinnikuman Zebra, Kinnikuman Big Body and a hidden character, Kinnikuman Great. Players must defeat their opponents with a combination of kicks, punches, submissions and super moves.

Kinnikuman is pictured on the cover with the original balloon font logo placed above him. The design may be simplistic but the subject of this game is iconic in Japan, with its popularity spanning over 30 years. He even has his own dedicated Kinnikuman Muscle Store in Shinsekai, Osaka.

KIRBY BOWL

カービィボウル
HAL LABORATORY / NINTENDO (1994)
GENRE: GOLF

HAL takes a departure from the traditional Kirby format and instead places him in an isometric golf game, where players compete to clear courses with the least amount of turns. Kirby Bowl began as a miniature golf game entitled Special Tee Shot, originally intended as an exclusive release for the Satellaview add-on. During development, however, Nintendo EAD collaborated with staff at HAL and redesigned the game to be themed on the Kirby franchise in the hope it would reach a bigger market. The game was then released as part of the Kirby series. Following its success in Japan, Kirby Bowl was released internationally in 1995 and renamed as Kirby's Dream Course for the SNES.

The Japanese box art recreates the game's chequered golf course and brings all of the game's components together in an illustration that is irresistibly cute. Kirby-themed metallic pink panels frame the artwork and the game's logo is cleverly incorporated at the bottom of the image.





KISHIN DŌJI ZENKI: BATORU RAIDEN

鬼神童子 ZENKI 烈闘雷伝
CAPRODUCTION /
HUDSON SOFT (1995)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

Based on the manga, Kishin Dōji Zenki (Demon Child Zenki), Battle Raiden was the third release by CAProductions, following Hagane and Galaxy Policewoman Legend Sapphire for the PC Engine. In ancient times, a sorceress named Ozuno defeated the demon queen Karuma with the aid of her guardian demon Zenki. Once peace had returned to the land, Ozuno sealed Zenki in a shrine, in an act to preserve his powers for future conflicts. Centuries later, a descendant of Ozuno's, named Chiaki, summons Zenki to help her when Karuma returns to destroy the Earth. We play as Zenki, switching between his child and 'Super Saiyan' adult forms, as he battles Karuma's evil monsters in a quest to defeat her once more.

Zenki features a cover by Kuroiwa Yoshihiro, the illustrator of the original manga. Zenki is pictured in both his child and adult form – an ability he can achieve via the use of a magical bracelet, owned by Chiaki. Vibrant reds and yellows are used to create a garish but impactful design. By contrast, Zenki's in-game art is some of the best created on the Super Famicom; a stunning looking title.

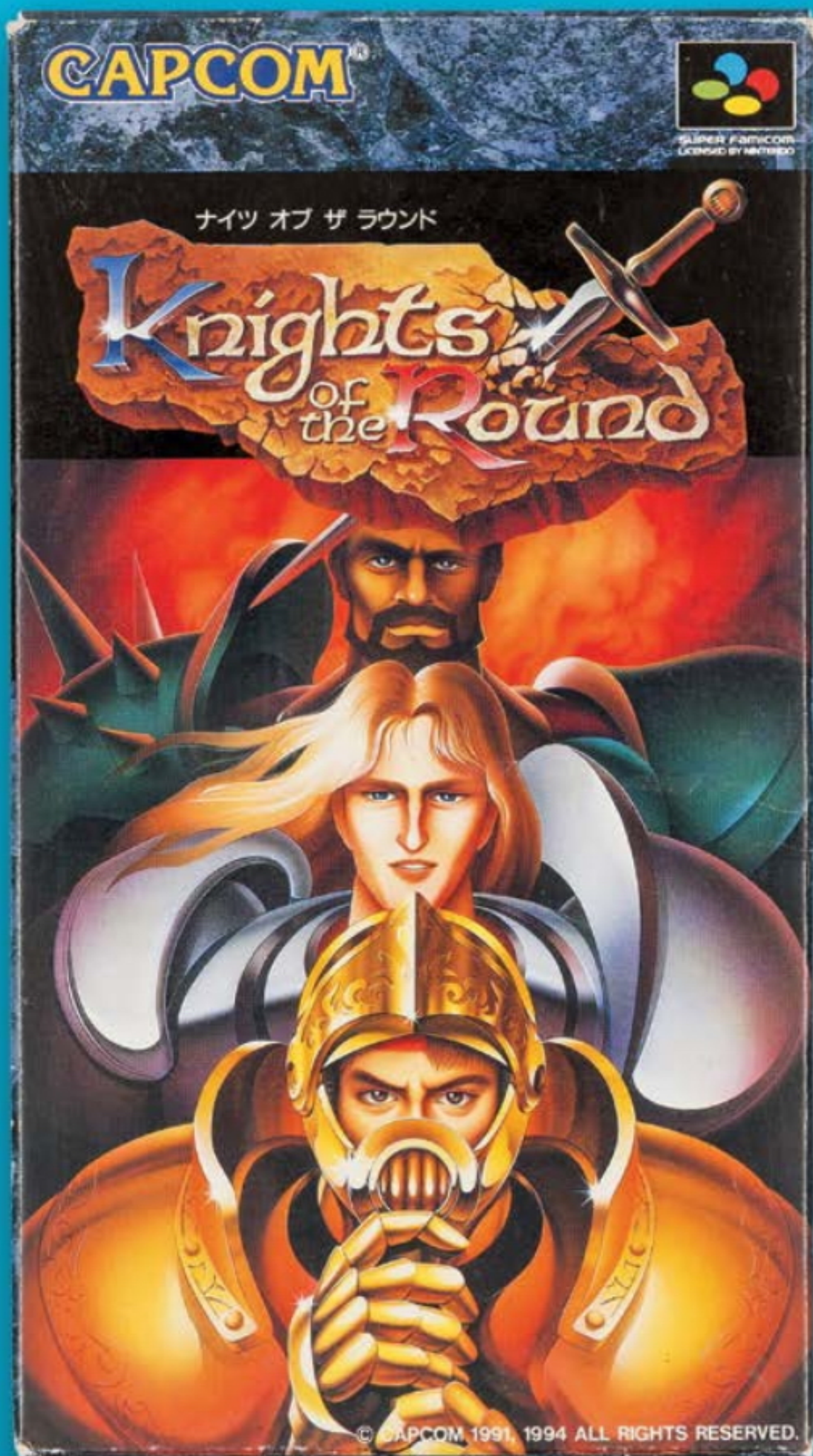
KISHIN KŌRINDEN: ONI

鬼神降臨伝 ONI
FANDORA BOX / BANPRESTO (1994)
GENRE: RPG

Set in feudal Japan, Kishin Kōrinden: Oni is an RPG bursting with supernatural elements despite its real-world trappings. Exploratory sections are twinned with the usual turn-based battles, but the distinctly Japanese flavour makes this a welcome break from the countless JRPGs inspired by European fantasy. The series began on the Game Boy with Kinin Kōmaroku: Oni in 1990, and would see another Super Famicom release in the shape of Bakumatsu Kōrinden: Oni in 1996. PlayStation title Oni Zero: Fukkatsu would conclude the series in 2000.

With cherry blossom falling from above, the cover stars of Kishin Kōrinden: Oni make an enticing – if somewhat intimidating – sight to the casual observer. The game's mixture of robots with medieval Japanese warriors is undeniably appealing, even if the almost complete absence of English text in-game makes it a hard ride for non-Japanese players.





KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND

ナイツ オブ ザ ラウンド

CAPCOM (1994)

GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

This arcade port is Capcom's own colourful take on Arthurian Legend and puts the player in control of Arthur, Lancelot or Perceval. The evil king Garibaldi rules over England with an iron fist, and its people live in terror. A young Arthur has just claimed the magical sword Excalibur from its stone; his destiny is cast and Merlin tasks Arthur and his companions with a mission to save England by overthrowing King Garibaldi and taking his place as the rightful king of England. Armour and weaponry is gradually enhanced as players fight through each level by obtaining high scores and discovering upgrades hidden within chests.

The box art is taken directly from the original arcade flyer, featuring our heroes in their fully upgraded form: Arthur in his golden armour, Lancelot in his silver spaulders, and Perceval, who starts the game as a young boy with blonde hair but once fully upgraded appears as a bald man complete with spiked pauldron and beard. The artwork also features an excellent logo design, themed loosely on the tale of the sword in the stone by 12th century French poet Robert de Boron.

KÖRYŪ NO MIMI

黄龍の耳

VAP (1995)

GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

Based on the anime and manga of the same name, this beat 'em up stars Natsume Kiroemon, the 45th leader of the Natsume family and next in line to inherit the Kōryū no Mimi, a magical earring which brings its bearer fortune, fame and as much female attention as they can cope with. Following his father's death and inheritance, Natsume leaves Italy to return to Japan and upon arriving falls in love with Kanako, a member of the rival Mina clan. In an act of petty revenge, the Mina clan abduct Kanako, so Natsume sets off to rescue her and defeat the clan members by harnessing the power of the Kōryū No Mimi, the 'Ear of the Golden Dragon'.

This bustling artwork crams all of the characters from the relatively obscure anime and positions them in classic cinema poster fashion. Natsume's earring can be seen overlapping the game's logo, which is adorned with gold ink. Kōryū No Mimi was released in small quantities in Japan and remains a cult manga title amongst Super Famicom collectors.





LADY STALKER – CHALLENGE FROM THE FAST

レディストーリーカー～過去からの挑戦～
CLIMAX ENTERTAINMENT /
TAITO (1995)
GENRE: RPG

The player takes the role of Lady, the headstrong daughter of a millionaire with a rebellious streak who travels the world as an adventurer. Her upper-class family roots mean that her gardener Yoshio and chef Cox are constantly in pursuit; both of these characters come into play later in the game and can be used to assist in combat. Lady travels to Desurando (Deathland) Island in search of riches, and encounters an array of monsters. However, all is not as it seems; Lady and her entourage must discover the secrets of Desurando Island and find the source of the evil doing.

Lady stands armed with her sword and whip, flanked by her trusty companions, chef Cox and Yoshio the gardener. Illustrated in a neat manga style, the characters are quite expressive, while the oddly cute monsters lurking in the distance hint at the game's sense of fun. Lady Stalker was never released outside of Japan but the main character does make an appearance in the Sega Dreamcast game, Time Stalkers, and a new Lady Stalker game was made for mobile phones in 2006.

LENNUS KODAI KIKAI NO KIOKU

LENNUS レナス 古代機械の記憶～
ASMIK (1992)
GENRE: RPG

Lennus: Memory of the Ancient Machine was released in the West under the name Paladin's Quest. We play as sorcerer student, Chezni, a young boy who, in an attempt to impress his friends, activates an ancient engine of destruction, the Dal Gren. The device unleashes an evil power and destroys the land, including his school of magic. The headmaster of the school orders Chezni to destroy Dal Gren before it obliterates everything in the world. A young orphan girl named Midia joins Chezni in his quest and they both set off to defeat the dictator Lord Zaygos, who wishes to harness the power of the Dal Gren for his own nefarious purposes.

Hiroyuki Kato and Keisuke Goto's cover of Lennus is a fine example of Japanese video game art. The soft pastel hues and delicate line art combine to create a dream-like illustration. The game's cast are not centred on the box, but are instead positioned around the edges, providing a frame for the eye to focus on the crystallised Dal Gren, floating in the sky. The manual also includes more character designs and illustrations of equal quality. Sadly, all of this artwork was omitted for the SNES release and different designs were created in order to appeal to a Western audience.





LETHAL ENFORCERS

リーサルエンフォーサーズ KONAMI (1994)
GENRE: LIGHT GUN SHOOT 'EM UP

Based on the arcade game of the same name, this light gun shooting game is set in Chicago, with players taking the role of Don Marshall, a beat cop who unintentionally gets entangled in a growing crime wave. Don is challenged with taking out the bad guys, rescuing hostages and climbing the ranks of the Chicago Police Department. The Japanese release came bundled with the game's light gun, 'The Justifier', a plastic device modelled on the a .357 Magnum, but in pale blue. A pink justifier was released and sold separately for two-player action although, sadly, Lethal Enforcers was the only Super Famicom game to support the peripheral. The game is notorious for featuring digitised images of real people as targets, and where the Japanese release featured an audio sample ("Die, pig!"), this was censored for the Super Nintendo release.

The Japanese box art removes the Dirty Harry-styled illustration used for the Western versions and instead combines photography with a Chicago skyline, blood red gradient and airbrushed handgun. More photo-based imagery is used for the instructions, which follows the game's visual style and the original arcade flyer. This enlarged box contains the game and Justifier light gun.

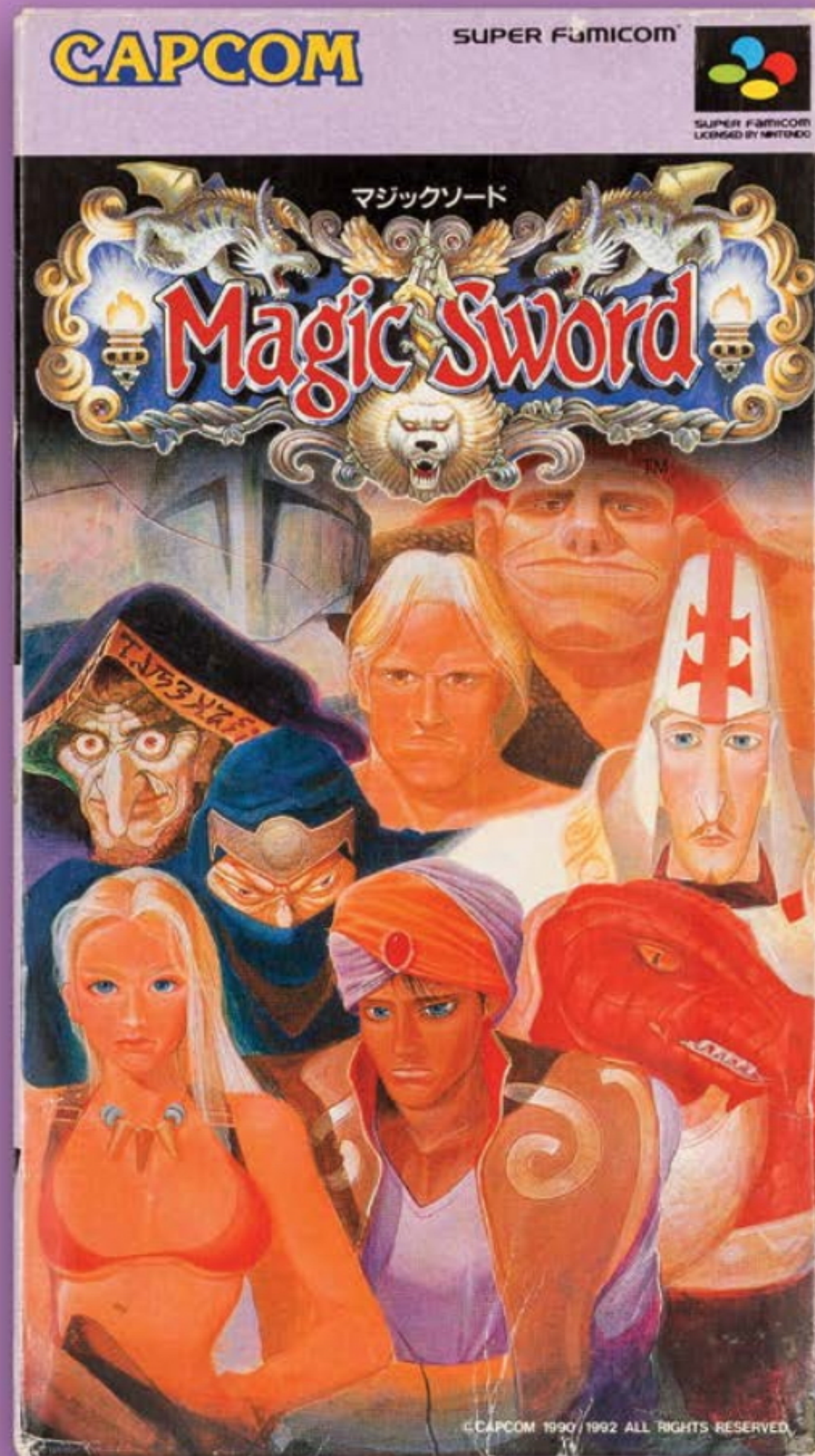
LUPIN III: DENSETSU NO HIHŌ WO OE!

ルパン三世 伝説の秘宝を追え!
POP HOUSE / SAS SAKATA /
EPOCH (1994)
GENRE: PLATFORM ACTION

Based on the classic late '60s Japanese Manga by Monkey Punch (Kazuhiko Katō), we play as master thief Arsène Lupin III. Following the kidnap of Fukijo Mine, Lupin's rival and occasional partner in crime, he recruits fellow criminals Jigen and Goemon, and they set out to rescue her from a skyscraper. Players negotiate rooftops, ventilation shafts and security devices in order to evade the police, led by his arch nemesis, Inspector Zenigata. From its humble beginnings as a weekly comic serial in 1967, Lupin III has grown into one of Japan's biggest and best-loved comic creations. The franchise continues to grow with over 50 years of animated series, live action films, toys, comics and televised specials to its name.

The box art features Goemon and Jigen facing to the right, with Fukijo positioned to the left. A dapper-looking Lupin takes centre stage in a suitably dramatic pose, while Inspector Zenigata looks on in comic bafflement as he attempts to hunt down the master thief and his gang. The clever use of a cracked glass motif centred on the bullet-shaped logo character conjures up images of crime shows and heist movies. The artwork is loosely based on the visual style used for the 1985 feature-length animation, Legend of the Gold of Babylon.





MAGIC SWORD

マジックソード
CAPCOM (1992)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

The world has been plunged into darkness by Lord Drokmar, corrupted by the seductive spell of the Black Orb – a mysterious object that provides immortality to anyone who possesses its sorcery. Drokmar raises an army of demons to aide in his tyranny and to protect the orb, which he keeps hidden at the top of his tower. We play as the Brave One, a warrior elected by the people to storm Drokmar’s 50-floor tower and destroy the Black Orb. Throughout the quest our hero can unlock doors and release allies who assist him in battle. These consist of an Amazon, Ninja, Thief, Priest, Big Man, Wizard, Lizard Man and Knight, each of whom has attacks suited to specific areas of the game

The cover is taken from the original arcade flyer art, illustrated by Akira Yasuda, in which the Brave One is pictured among his various in-game allies. Yasuda chooses to position the game’s protagonist in the centre of the illustration, but near the back of the crowd, which provides a focus on the supporting cast and their varied character design. Unusually, the image is painted like a medieval fresco complete with cracks in the plaster. The Super Famicom box art is a censored version of the arcade flyer with the removal of a visible areola on the Amazon character, which can be seen on the original. This subtle alteration was likely made to ensure approval from Nintendo of Japan.

MAJYŪŌ

魔獣王
KSS (1995)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

Majyūō – or King of Demons – is a platform combat game that shares similarities with Castlevania, Altered Beast and the Contra series. We play as Abel, who discovers that his friend Bayer has sacrificed Abel’s wife and child in a satanic ritual designed to resurrect the King of Demons and to transform himself into his demonic servant. Before Abel’s wife dies, she grants him the ability to enter the gates of hell, in the hope that he can rescue their daughter, Iria. Abel must descend into the depths of the underworld, cast his mortal body aside and become a demon to rescue his daughter from the clutches of the King of Demons.

This dark and disturbing game from KSS features excellent box art. Abel is pictured in the foreground in half demonic form, a scaled hand raised to conceal his metamorphosis. Hell is pictured behind him, featuring demons intertwined with limbs, eyeballs and entrails. The King of Demons towers above it all, with wings that envelope the edges of the artwork. Abel’s daughter Iria can be seen trapped between the jaws of Majyūō, and behind them lies a portal to the human realm, represented by a pentagram. Overall, this is a surprisingly graphic and dark illustration for a Super Famicom cover.





MARIO & WARIO

マリオとワリオ

GAME FREAK / NINTENDO (1993)

GENRE: PUZZLE / PLATFORM

Developed by Game Freak, the team behind the Pokémon series, Mario & Wario is a Japanese-exclusive puzzle game, which makes use of the Super Famicom Mouse peripheral and almost all of the in-game text is displayed in English. After selecting a character from Princess, Yoshi and Mario, the game begins with Wario dropping a bucket on our character's head. Players control a fairy named Wanda and must guide our hero through each level as they walk blindly across the screen. Traps, obstacles, blocks and enemies must be disabled before our character walks into them. Once a path is cleared through the complex, puzzle-like level, Luigi removes the offending helmet and our character progresses to the next, with 100 levels to beat in all.

Using Nintendo's characteristic art style, Mario is perched precariously at the edge of a crumbling platform as Wanda swoops in to rescue him. An enlarged Wario gleefully looks on, in typical evil mastermind fashion. The box features bright yellow borders, themed on Wario's clothing, and is the first Nintendo packaging to appear with this colour scheme. The artwork cleverly creates an illusion of depth by placing a soft haze over the god-like figure of Wario, causing him to recede into the background while making Mario and Wanda more prominent.

MARIO NO SUPER PICROSS

マリオのスーパーピクロス

JUPITER / APE / NINTENDO (1995)

GENRE: PUZZLE

This puzzle game by Jupiter features Mario-themed Picross puzzles. Picross, also known as Nonograms and Griddlers, are picture logic puzzles in which cells in a grid are coloured or left blank according to numbers along the sides. Correctly selecting the right cells reveals a hidden picture. The Picross phenomenon started in Japanese puzzle magazines in the late '80s and combines elements of Sudoku with grid art creation. In Mario No Super Picross, players are tasked with deciphering the picture in every level, which leads to more complex puzzles. Each game is played against the clock and a hammer and chisel are used to knock out squares from a stone grid.

Nintendo's top 'n' tail box template uses the traditional Mario cap red (Nintendo's 1993 colour reference guide cites Pantone 486 as the 'official' Mario cap colour). A Picross pattern is pictured, revealing a partial close-up of Mario emerging from the puzzle as it's deciphered. The use of red and focus on only a small portion of Mario's eyes and nose is both impactful and instantly recognisable. The artwork is a great early example of using Mario as a brand identity, rather than merely an in-game protagonist.





MARIO PAINT

マリオとワリオ INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS / NINTENDO (1992)
GENRE: CREATIVITY

Arguably the most memorable and unique console title of the 16-bit generation, Mario Paint was Nintendo's first attempt at providing players with the opportunity to create music and artwork. The game comes bundled with Nintendo's mouse peripheral, plastic mouse pad, manual, 'quick start' fold-out guide, laminated hints card and mouse cleaner tool. Mario Paint also features a mini-game, which requires players to swat insects that appear across the screen. This was reintroduced in the 2015 Wii-U title Mario Maker. Its producer Takashi Tezuka said in an interview with GamesMaster magazine, "For a long time I've wanted to create a game like Mario Paint for today's generation."

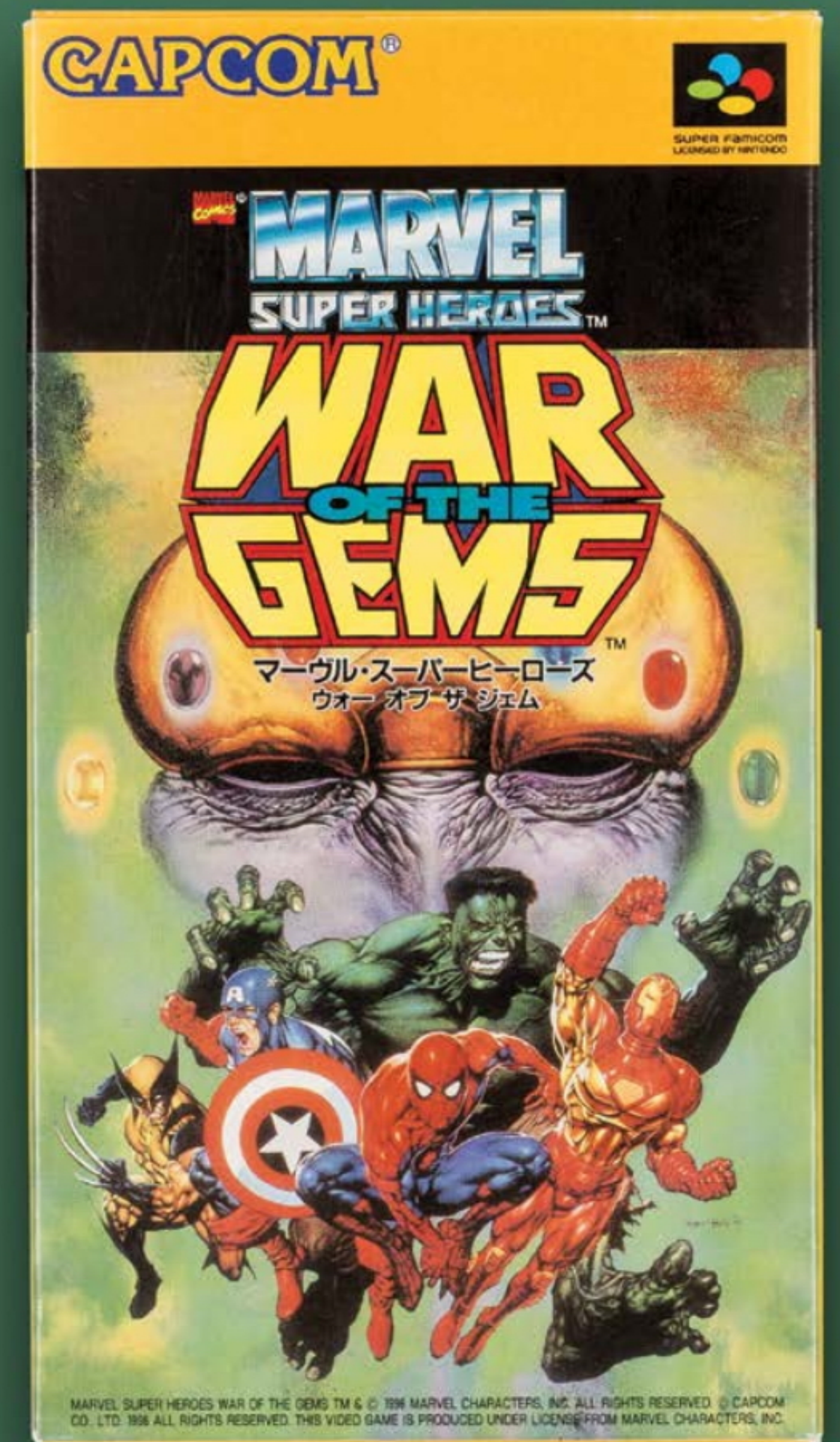
The Mario Paint packaging cleverly removes the need for box art and instead pictures the mouse and a small example of what can be created (with a playful Mario providing the brushstrokes with his paint palette and backwards cap). This decision to have a minimalist cover emphasises the importance of the software itself as being a tool for visual art and music composition, and serves to differentiate it from purely gaming titles. Somewhat predictably, the Western release simply opts for a traditional image of Mario in front of an easel, making it look like a Mario painting game.

MARVEL SUPER HEROES: WAR OF THE GEMS

マーヴル・スーパーヒーローズ ウォー
オブ ザ ジェム
CAPCOM (1996)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

Marvel Super Heroes: War of the Gems is loosely based on the Marvel Comics series, Infinity Gauntlet by Jim Starlin. In the game's plot, Adam Warlock recruits Earth's greatest super heroes to seek out the Infinity Gems before they fall into the hands of Thanos, the game's final boss. Thanos plans to use the Infinity Gems to control the 'multiverse' – time, space, soul, reality, mind and power – and in doing so, will erase all opposing superheroes in the universe. Each stage requires the player to control a different superhero, including Captain America, Iron Man, Spider-Man, Wolverine and Hulk.

British artist Glen Fabry's artwork was used for both the SNES and Super Famicom releases, however the painting is only revealed in full on the portrait Japanese box. The face of Thanos is partially exposed through a haze of green and yellow mist, surrounded by the Infinity Gems. The game's heroes appear in traditional comic book action poses, with Spider-Man leading the pack, flanked by Iron Man, Captain America and Wolverine, while Hulk's dark greens provide contrast for the leading characters. A unique Marvel-themed video game cover.





MAZINGER Z

マジンガーZ

WINKYSOFT / BANDAI (1993)

GENRE: SCROLLING COMBAT

Dr. Hell's army of atomic-powered mechanical beasts have destroyed Tokyo, and now only pilot Koji Kabuto and his giant robot Mazinger Z can stop him and his army from conquering the world. The player controls Mazinger Z and must battle with various foes and bosses from the series across a number of stages including Mount Fuji, Tokyo and Dr. Hell's military base. Mazinger Z's armoury includes chest plate laser beams, atomic-powered karate kicks and his signature move, the 'Rocket Punch'. Mazinger Z is based on the influential manga and anime series of the same name, created by artist Go Nagai (Kiyoshi Nagai).

Mazinger Z's box art is based on the visual style of the animated television series of the 1970s. The manga and anime series featured hundreds of Nagai's nuclear mechanical foes and the cover features some of the original mecha beasts, including Garada K7, Doublas M2, Bamara Y1, Zaila and Belga V5. Mazinger stands in the centre, raising his fist to summon his Rocket Punch manoeuvre. From its logo to the style of artwork, Mazinger Z's packaging and game content provides pure fan service to devotees of the original and a cult appeal to collectors in the West.

MICKEY & DONALD -

MAGICAL ADVENTURE 3

ミッキーとドナルド マジカルアドベンチャー

CAPCOM (1992)

GENRE: PLATFORM ADVENTURE

This final instalment in the Magical Adventure trilogy follows the adventures of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck. After playing a prank on their uncle Donald, Huey, Dewey and Louie hide in the attic. There, the boys find a strange old book, which they discover to be magic; upon opening it, a hand reaches out and pulls them into its pages. Mickey and Donald set off in search for the boys, with the help of Pluto the dog. They find the book and discover a picture of Donald's nephews, trapped within its pages. Suddenly, a fairy appears and tells Mickey and Donald that the evil king Pete has taken control of Storyland and kidnapped the boys. She then transports them to Storyland, where Mickey and Donald must rescue Huey, Dewey and Louie and defeat the evil king Pete. As with previous games, special outfits are revealed throughout the game, enabling Mickey and Donald to dress as mountaineers and knights, and each outfit can be upgraded by visiting stores between levels.

Mickey and Donald are dressed in their knight outfits as they battle through a medieval town pursued by Pete's henchmen. The art style is consistent with the previous Magical Adventure games, even using the same typography. Magical Adventure 3 was exclusive to Japan and features some of the best in-game art and animation of the series.





MICKEY & MINNIE

MAGICAL ADVENTURE 2 – THE GREAT CIRCUS MYSTERY

ミッキーとミニー マジカルアドベンチャー2
CAPCOM (1994)
GENRE: PLATFORM ADVENTURE

Mickey and Minnie take a trip to visit the circus that has arrived in town. On arrival they meet Goofy, who tells them that everyone has gone and that the circus tents are “topsy-turvy”. Mickey and Minnie set out to discover what happened to the circus and to find their friends, Donald and Pluto. However they soon discover that evil baron Pete has taken over the land with his gang of ghosts and scared everyone away. Mickey and Minnie explore a number of levels including the haunted circus, a jungle, haunted house, caves, frozen plains and finally Pete’s castle. A number of outfits are introduced throughout the game, including a ‘sweeper outfit’, complete with giant vacuum cleaner and backpack, a safari outfit with grappling hook, and a cowboy outfit with cork gun and wooden hobbyhorse. The game is notable for the debut of Minnie Mouse as a playable character.

The cover reveals Mickey and Minnie in their cowboy outfits as they take on Pete’s miniature ghost clowns and henchmen. The circus tent expands across the top of the artwork, providing a sense of scale and the typography is a mixture of both Katakana and English (probably due to the length of the title).

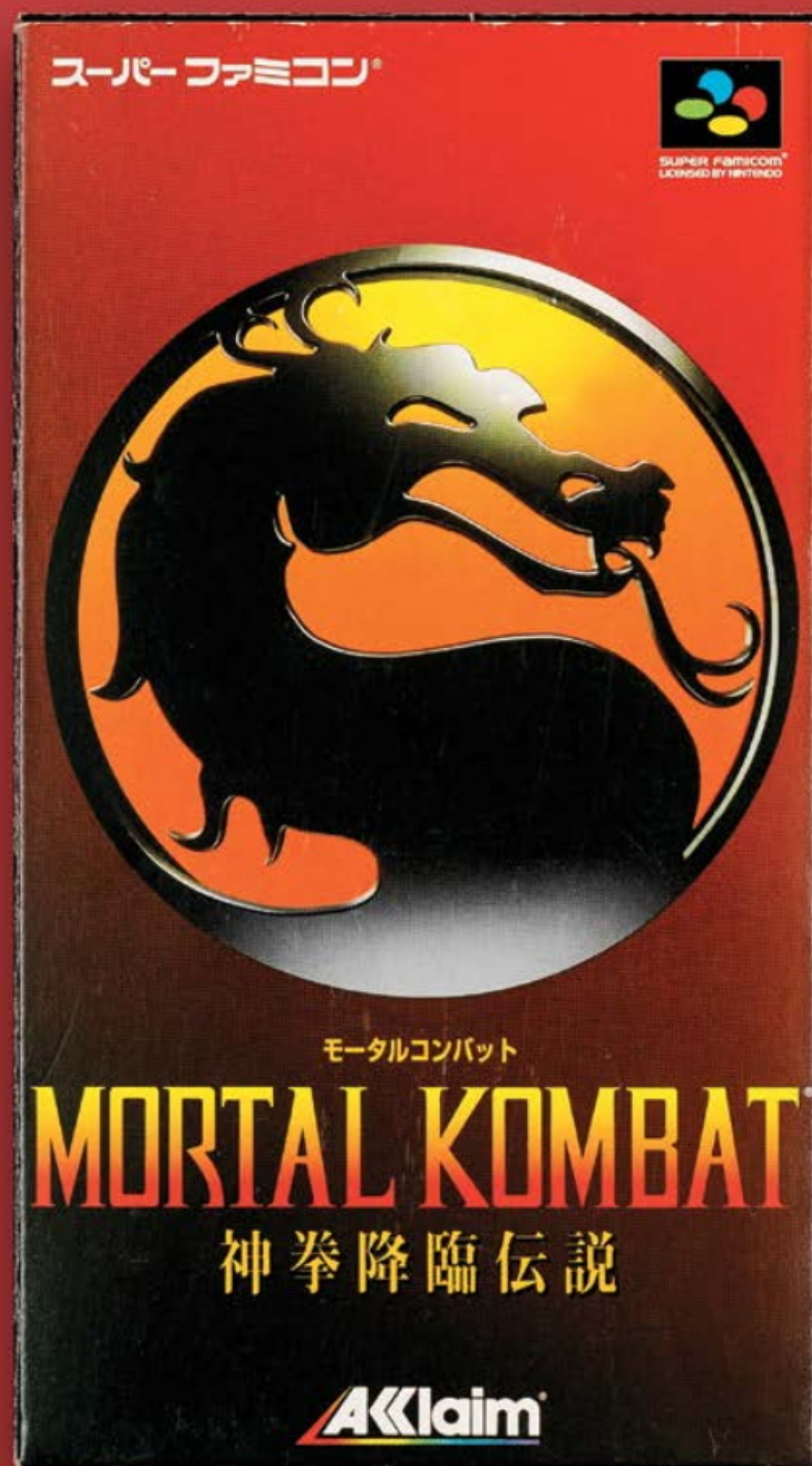
MICKEY NO MAGICAL ADVENTURE

ミッキーのマジカルアドベンチャー
CAPCOM (1992)
GENRE: PLATFORM ADVENTURE

Known as The Magical Quest starring Mickey Mouse on SNES, the game begins with Mickey Mouse playing catch in the park with Pluto, Goofy and Donald Duck. When Goofy throws the ball into the distance, Pluto decides to chase after it with Goofy in tow. Mickey sets off to look for them both but during his search, he accidentally tumbles off a cliff into a mysterious forest. He then meets a wizard who tells him that the evil Emperor Pete has captured Pluto. Mickey decides to rescue him and the magician offers to help by providing Mickey with magical boxes. These are revealed throughout the game, and each box contains a costume for Mickey to wear, granting him special powers.

A dark, spooky forest replete with creepy trees and claw-like branches surrounds Mickey as he stands in his magician costume. His enchanted orb illuminates the setting, allowing the artist to paint Mickey in bright warm colours. Emperor Pete is placed in the shadows as he grips on to Pluto, stifling his bark. The artwork contains a familiarity and style that’s synonymous with Disney cartoons – although there’s no sign of the now-ubiquitous Disney logo and the title is presented entirely in Japanese.





MORTAL KOMBAT SHINKEN KŌRIN DENSETSU

モータルコンバット
神拳降臨伝説
SCULPTURED SOFTWARE / MIDWAY /
ACCLAIM JAPAN (1993)
GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

A hit in the arcades and on home consoles, Mortal Kombat was definitely the must-have game of its time – brutal and violent, yet slightly absurd with its ‘fatalities’ and extreme use of gore and blood. Players select their character from a number of assailants: Raiden, the god of thunder; Kano, the mercenary; Special Forces agent Sonya Blade; Hollywood movie star Johnny Cage; the mysterious ninjas Sub-Zero and Scorpion; Goro the game’s sub-boss; and Shang Tsung, the final boss who possesses the ability to morph into any character. The game’s hidden character ‘Reptile’ appears if players achieve a double flawless victory. Despite the game’s intentional black humour, its semi-realistic digitised sprites caused concern amongst the American Government. This in part led to the creation of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) when pressure from the Federal Government caused the American video game industry to create its own rating system.

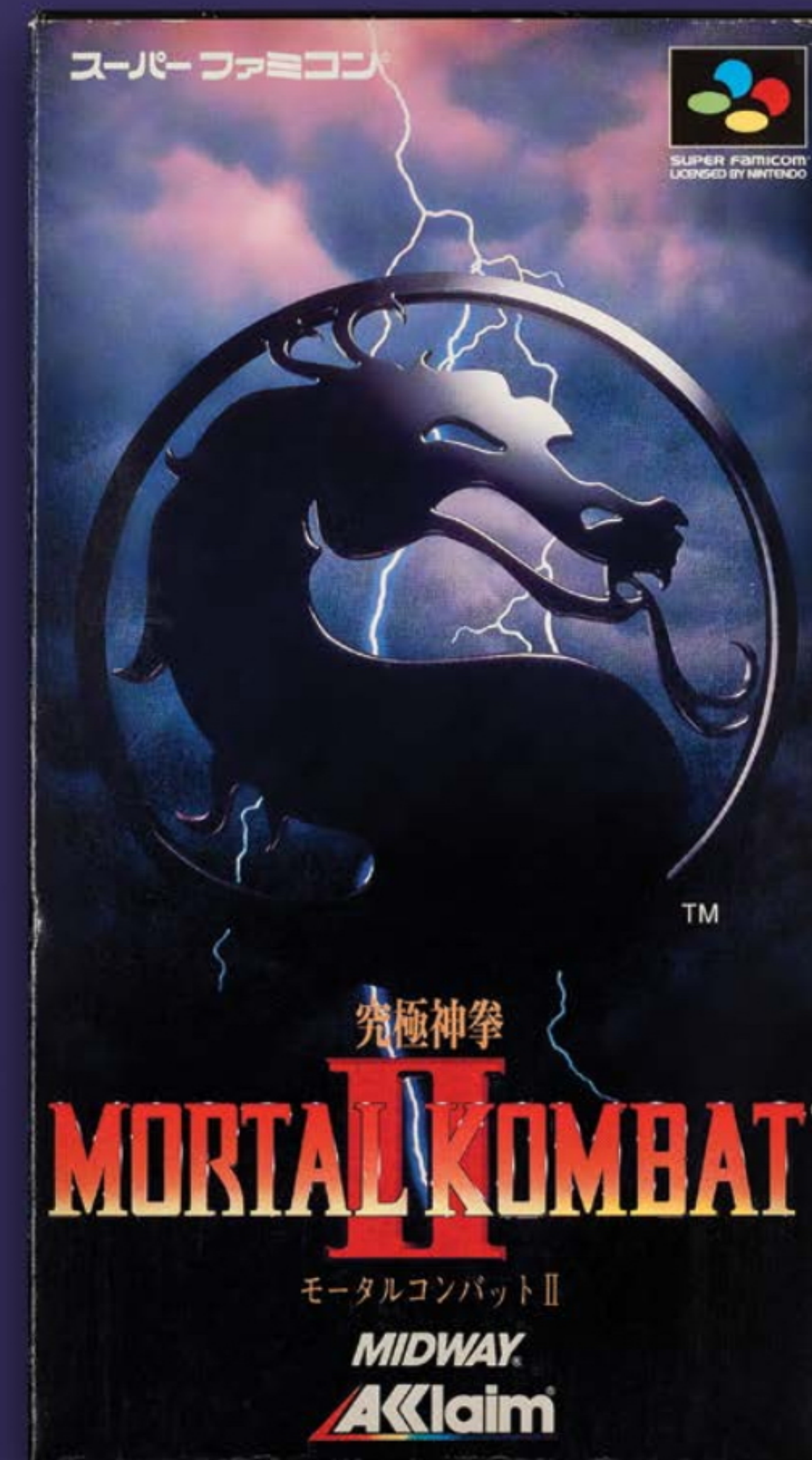
The cover displays a beautifully rendered version of the now-famous arcade game logo, which was emblazoned across thousands of coin-op cabinets in its heyday. Mortal Kombat was one of the biggest-selling games of the ‘90s but only two Super Famicom Mortal Kombat games were released; the third a was cancelled due to poor sales in Japan.

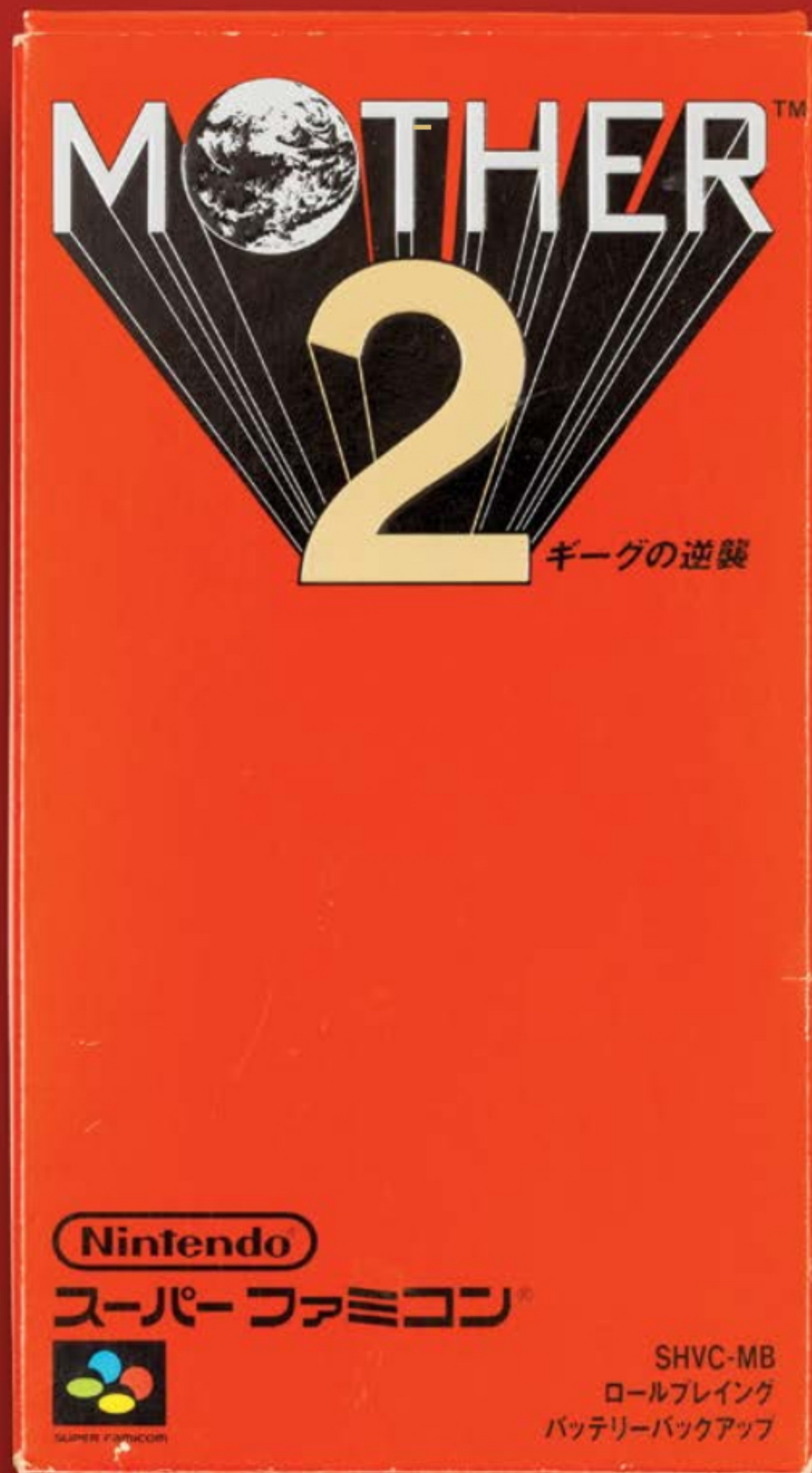
MORTAL KOMBAT II – KYŪKYOKU SHINKEN

モータルコンバットII 究極神拳
SCULPTURED SOFTWARE / MIDWAY /
ACCLAIM JAPAN (1994)
GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

Shang Tsung’s failure in the inaugural Mortal Kombat tournament forces him to sheepishly approach his master Shao Kahn with a fresh proposal: establish a second contest in the Outerworld to lure the Earthrealm warriors to certain doom. What follows is a battle royal in which blood is spilled, limbs torn asunder and internal organs extracted from writhing bodies. The original Mortal Kombat was a controversial success the world over, and this sequel is considered to be one of the best in the lineage.

In a rare case of global uniformity, the cover art for the Super Famicom version of Mortal Kombat II is near identical to that seen in other parts of the world. The iconic logo is shown with lightning forking across the background, a dramatic portent of the titanic struggle contained within.





MOTHER 2

GYIYG NO GYAKUSHU

マザー2 ギーグの逆襲

APE STUDIOS / HAL LABORATORY /

NINTENDO (1994)

GENRE: RPG

Better known in the west as EarthBound, Mother 2 is an RPG with a difference. Set in a sleepy town, it stars a young and inquisitive lead called Ness who finds himself unwittingly embroiled in a devious alien plot to take over the world. Mother 2 gleefully pokes fun at genre tropes but delivers an incredibly powerful message; little wonder then that the game is considered a classic in both Japan and the West, with enigmatic series creator Shigesato Itoi being hailed as a genius by fans.

In keeping with the covers to Mother 1 (Famicom, 1989) and Mother 3 (Game Boy Advance, 2006), the box art for Mother 2 is the very definition of subtle – a red cover with the logo. It's a stunning contrast to the North American cover for EarthBound, which has an almost overwhelming and psychedelic early '90s aesthetic.

MOTOKO-CHAN NO WONDER KITCHEN

もと子ちゃんのワンダーキッチン

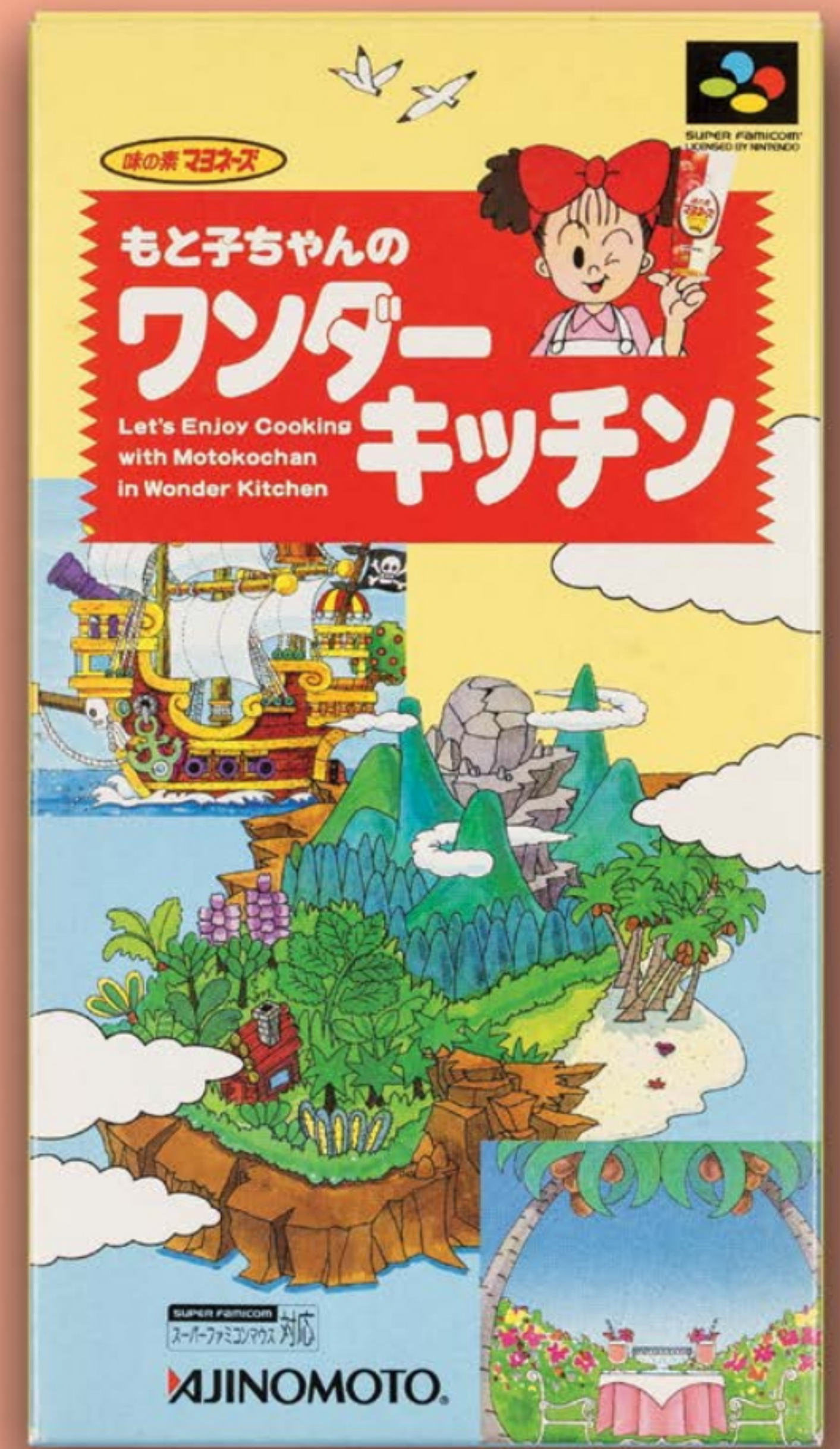
ROCKET GAMES /

AJINOMOTO CO. (1993)

GENRE: PUZZLE / COOKING

This rare, non-commercial release was created to promote Ajinomoto, a Japanese condiment company, similar to the American food processing corporation, Heinz. During its limited promotion, Wonder Kitchen could only be obtained via mailed proof of purchase of two Ajinomoto mayonnaise cartons. Star of the game is Motoko-chan, a young chef who's a whizz with Ajinomoto-brand mayonnaise, wisely knowing that it's the best brand of mayo and 'goes with just about everything'. Motoko's larder has, however, been whisked away to a land filled with fairies, dwarves and witches, and you must track down the ingredients while playing mini-games and learning some Japanese recipes along the way.

Motoko-chan is pictured atop a colourful map that contains many of the lands that she explores from the portal within her larder. The colour scheme is styled on Ajinomoto's own corporate branding but despite its tie-in with a rather bland product, Wonder Kitchen features an excellent hand-drawn cover, full of detail and balanced graphic design. This obscure game is, in some respect, a predecessor to Taito's Cooking Mama for the Nintendo DS.





MUSCLE BOMBER – THE BODY EXPLOSION

マッスルボマー ザ・ボディー・エク
スプロージョン
CAPCOM (1994)
GENRE: WRESTLING

Having conquered the one-on-one fighting genre with Street Fighter II, Capcom aimed to capitalise on the popularity of wrestling with this gloriously over-the-top brawler, which made its thundering debut as a CPS-1 arcade release in 1993. Without an official licence the company created a cast of truly memorable combatants whose names were almost as outlandish as their costumes. Despite the grappling theme, the game controls very much like Capcom's other fighters of the period. In the West it was released under the title Saturday Night Slam Masters, and in 1994 would receive an arcade sequel named Ring of Destruction: Slam Masters II.

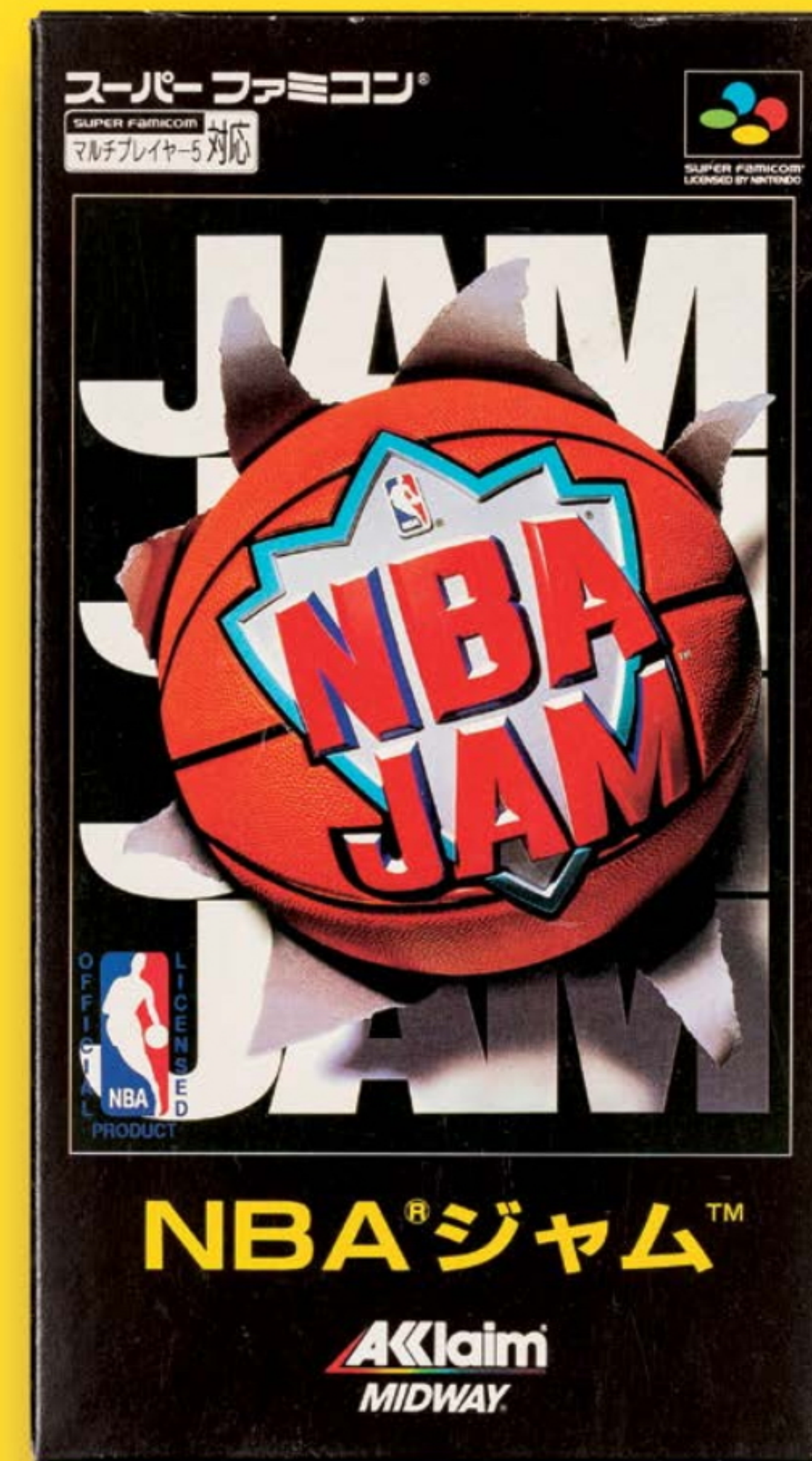
The art of Tetsuo Hara adorns Muscle Bomber's distinctively hyperactive cover – the Fist of the North Star artist delivers a colourful mish-mash of characters, with protagonist Aleksey Zalazof heading up the likes of Sheep the Royal, Titan the Great and Final Fight's Mike 'Macho' Haggar, as the sinister final boss known only as 'The Astro' looks on menacingly.

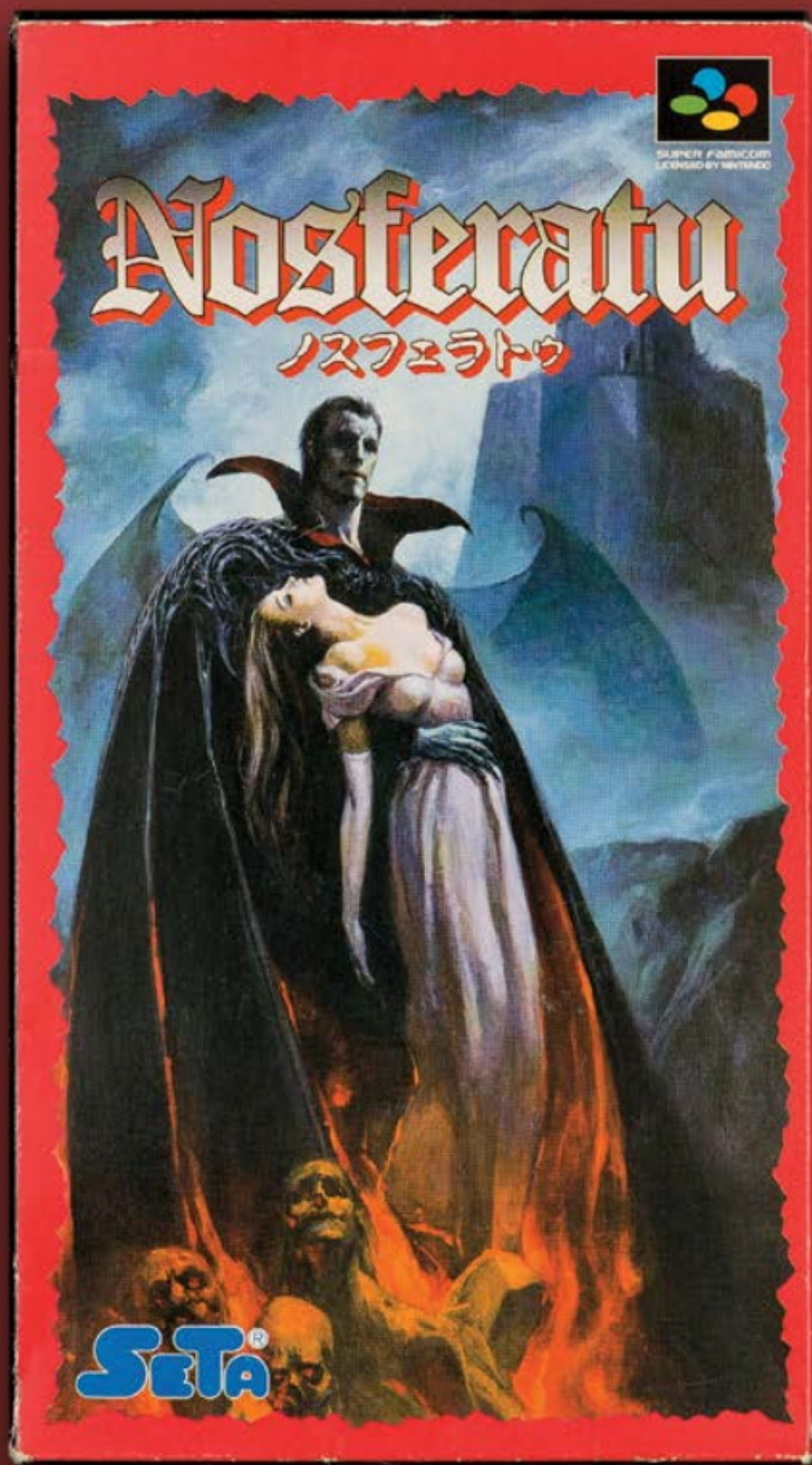
NBA JAM

NBAジャム
IGUANA ENTERTAINMENT / MIDWAY /
ACCLAIM JAPAN (1994)
GENRE: SPORTS

Heavily inspired by Midway's previous arcade basketball hit Arch Rivals, NBA Jam is the brainchild of Mark Turmell, who also worked on many other arcade hits like Smash TV, Total Carnage and NFL Blitz. Ranked as one of the highest-earning arcade games of all time, it boasts real-life players and teams but supplants on-court realism for fantastical elements, such as balls that catch fire and singe the net, and players capable of leaping many feet into the air before delivering an earth-shattering slam-dunk.

As was the case with the Super Famicom release of Mortal Kombat 2, Acclaim simply used the Western box art for the Japanese release of NBA Jam. It shows a basketball, emblazoned with the now-iconic logo, bursting through the background, while the all-important NBA badge – denoting the officiality of the product – takes pride of place in the bottom-left corner.





NOSFERATU

ノスフェラトゥ

SETA (1994)

GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

When the vampire Nosferatu kidnaps Kyle's girlfriend Erin, the headstrong youth vows to rescue her at all costs. Armed only with his fists and physical agility, Kyle has to overcome a legion of horrifying enemies, including werewolves, zombies and vengeful spirits. Boasting smooth, realistic animation and a host of platforming puzzles to solve, Nosferatu was predictably compared to Prince of Persia upon release; it's an atmospheric mix of Jordan Mechner's legendary title and Konami's similarly-themed Akumajō Dracula – or Castlevania as it's known in the West.

Jun Suemi's Nosferatu cover is a superbly rendered image of the vampire antagonist clutching the helpless – yet undeniably alluring – Erin. The very flames of hell appear to be licking at his feet, while the damned squirm in eternal torment. The player character Kyle is notably absent from the image.

OSU!! KARATE BU

押忍!! 空手部

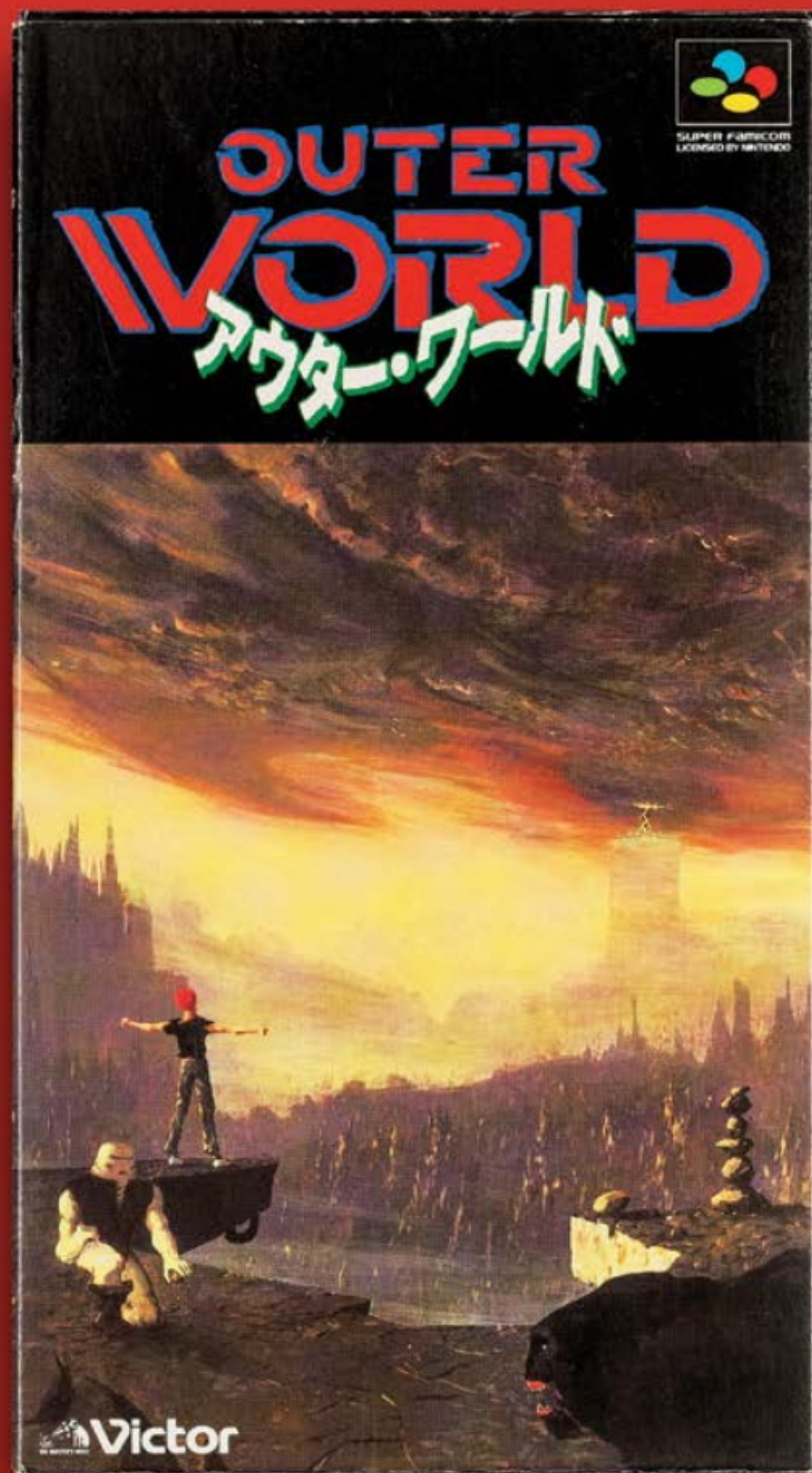
CULTURE BRAIN (1994)

GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

Koji Takahashi's manga series serves as the basis for this 1994 brawler, with the same group of unruly students from Kangokō High School taking centre stage. Unsurprisingly, it's a one-on-one fighter in the same style as Capcom's influential and oft-copied Street Fighter II, but it's not as slavish a clone as some of its contemporaries; there are no rounds, and each fighter has a single life gauge. Once this is depleted they are subject to a three-count, but it is possible to get back up and continue the fight, assuming the player has enough 'ki' power in reserve. However, only three knock-downs are permitted before the winner is declared.

Karate club captain and central character Takagi Yoshiyuki is the dominating feature of the cover artwork for Osu!! Karate Bu. His student Matsushita Tadashi was the main protagonist when the series began, but after the first few volumes the spotlight fell on the more outrageous and amusing Takagi.





OUTER WORLD

アウター・ワールド

DELPHINE SOFTWARE / INTERPLAY / VICTOR (1992)

GENRE: PLATFORM ADVENTURE

When talented scientist Lester Knight Chaykin tries to unravel the origins of the universe, his experiment goes awry and transports him to a strange world where he must call upon his wits – and the help of an alien ally – to survive. Boasting flat-shaded characters with smooth animation, Outer World – known in Europe as Another World and Out of this World in North America – was innovative in its use of in-game cut-scenes, which lent the action a cinematic quality, despite the lack of dialogue.

Outer World uses the same cover art – created by the game's designer, Éric Chahi – as the European version of the game, which is based on the original artwork made for the home computer versions. It's a highly dramatic image showing Chaykin standing, arms extended, in defiance of the hostile alien world he unwittingly finds himself in. The image sums up the game quite neatly, with his alien comrade 'Buddy' picking up a stone and preparing to defend Chaykin against an advancing monster.

PARODIUS DA! SHINWA KARA OWARAI HE

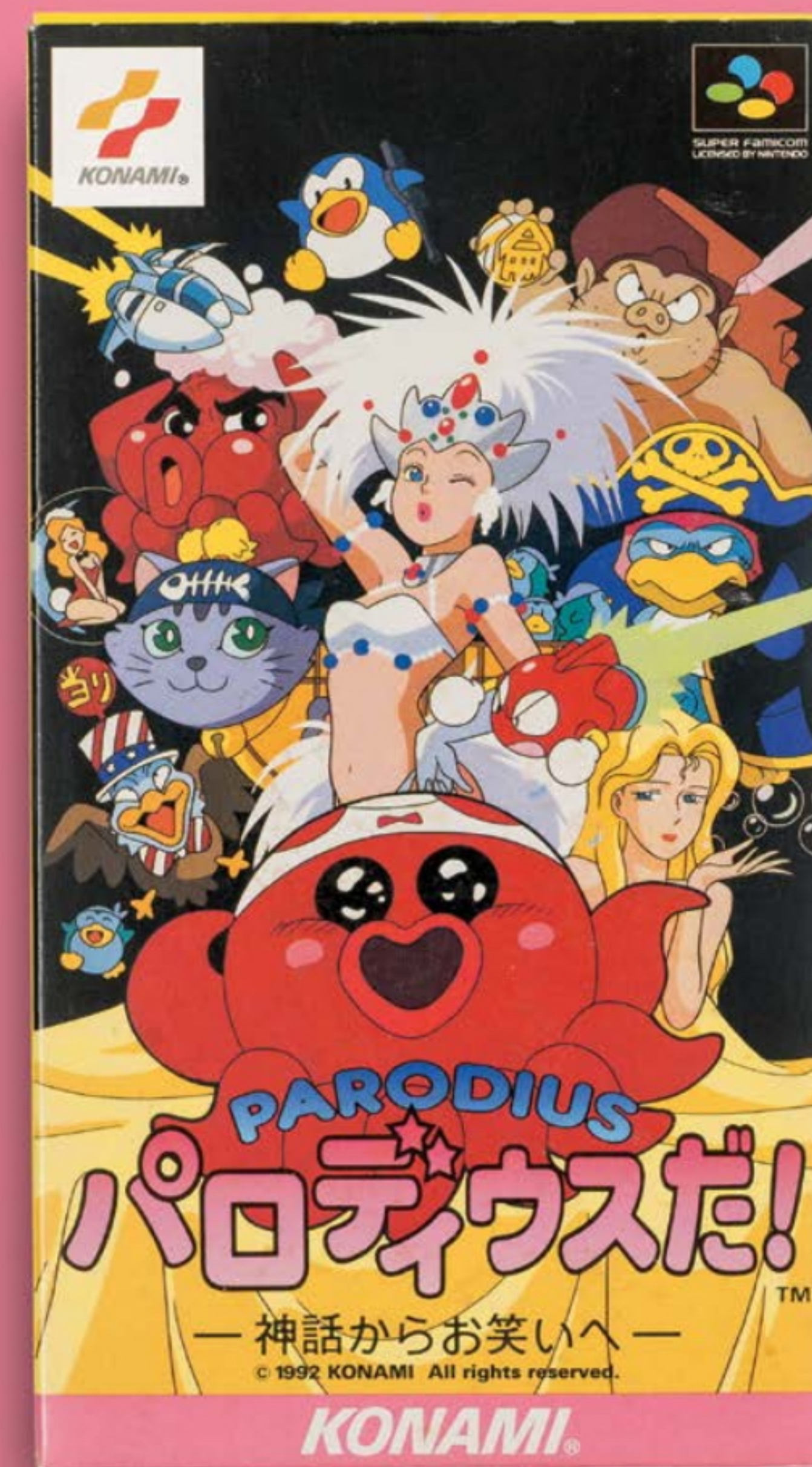
パロディウスだ！－神話からお笑いへ－

KONAMI (1992)

GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

Often mistaken for the first entry in Konami's intentionally humorous Parodius series, this is actually the second release – although its conversions to the PC Engine, Famicom, Game Boy, X68000, PlayStation, Saturn and – of course – Super Famicom make Parodius da! Shinwa Kara Owarai he arguably the most famous entry in the franchise. Heavily inspired by the gameplay of Konami stablemate Gradius, this horizontal shooter features comical enemies, massive bosses and deliciously infectious music.

While the hero characters do feature on the game's cover, centre stage is given to Parodius da!'s many inventive bosses including dancer Chichibinta Rika, a battleship with a cat's head and Honey, a slumbering female who blows bubbles containing babies in your direction. Set against the straight-faced shooters of the period, it's easy to see why Parodius made such an impact.





PHALANX

THE ENFORCE FIGHTER A-144

ファランクス

ZOOM / KEMCO (1992)

GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

The year is 2279 AD. A scientific planetary research team is sent into the depths of space. One particular group of researchers lands on the planet Delia and, once it's found to be rich in natural resources, a mining colony is established. Some time later, an emergency transmission from Delia is sent to their security force, MIDAS. The only clue they are given is a message regarding a hazardous leak. Delia's space security forces are then suddenly possessed by an unknown alien race. We play as Riki Sanada, a genetically engineered teenage MIDAS pilot. His mission: investigate the situation on Delia and destroy all hostile forces with his Graystone-powered A-144/R Phalanx.

Phalanx is perhaps best remembered for its packaging on both sides of the Pacific. The original Japanese Sharp X6800 release featured wonderful box art by Tamiya model artist, Yoshiyuki Takani. The Super Famicom box works from the same visual design that Takani established, and an action sequence is created for the cover, with great use of perspective from an uncredited illustrator. The dreadful banjo-playing hillbilly photograph used for the American Super Nintendo release is a missed opportunity, and rather than depicting the storyline, it instead implies the graphic designer's complete ignorance of the game's plot and existing artwork.

PILOTWINGS

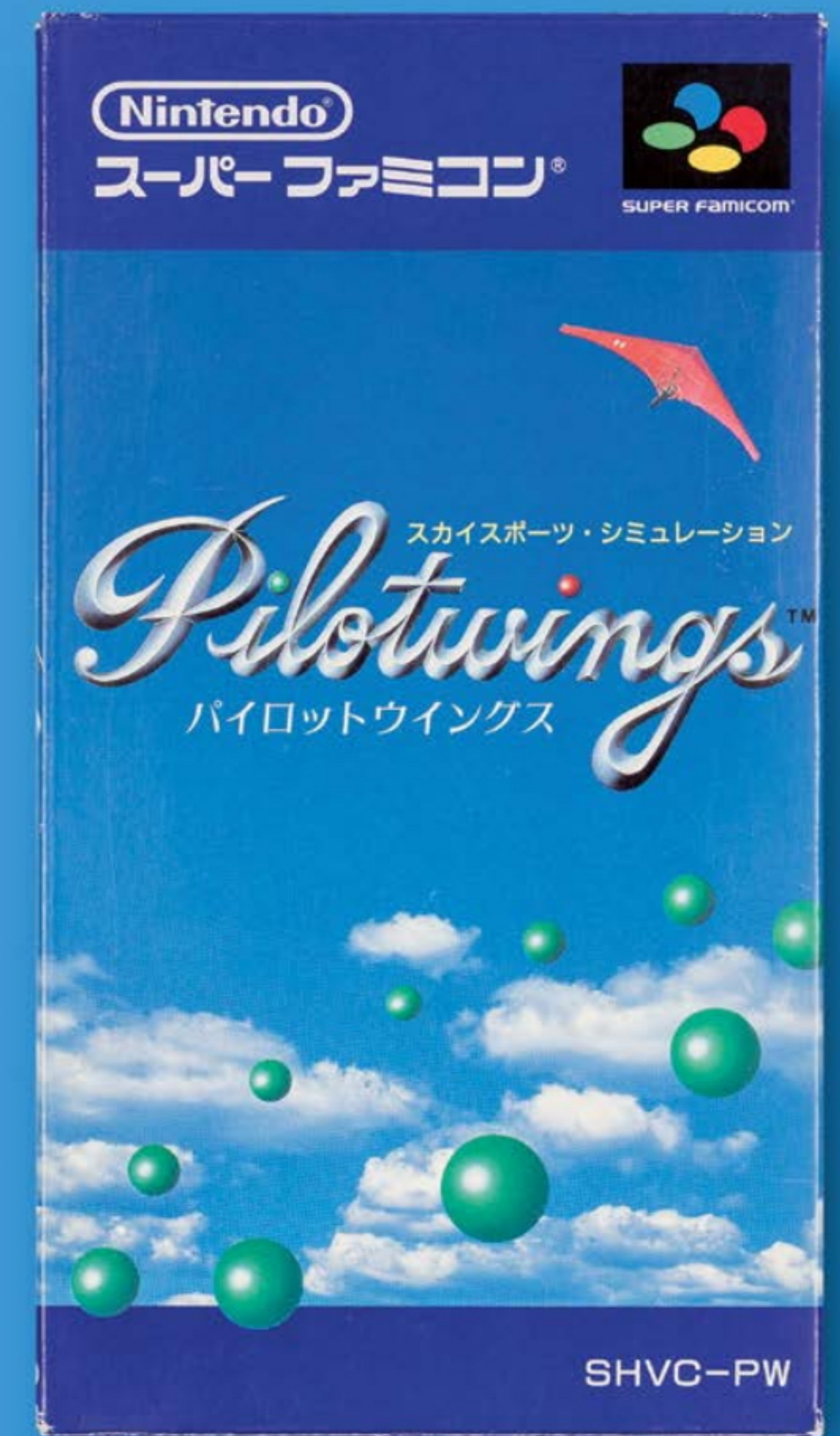
パイロットウイングス

NINTENDO (1990)

GENRE: FLIGHT SIM

An early demonstration of the Super Famicom's Mode 7 scaling effect, Pilotwings gives players the chance to take to the skies in a series of challenges, with the ultimate goal being the attainment of all the pilot licences. Skydiving and hang gliding feature, as does a light plane and rocket pack. As a bonus, you can even hop into the cockpit of a top-of-the-line military helicopter for some target practice while evading missiles. Pilotwings would receive a notable sequel on the Nintendo 64, while the 3DS release Pilotwings Resort was more of an homage than a full-blown successor.

Given the aerial nature of the action, it's fitting that the cover to Pilotwings is predominantly blue sky, with only the clouds and a hang glider breaking up the design. In the foreground of the image there's a ring comprised of green spheres, referencing the course markers you need to fly through to complete many of the game's challenges.





PINOCCHIO

ピノキオ

DISNEY INTERACTIVE / VIRGIN
INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT /
CAPCOM (1996)

GENRE: PLATFORM ADVENTURE

Based on Walt Disney's 1940 animated classic and following hot in the footsteps of Virgin's other big hits of the period – Aladdin and Lion King – Pinocchio showcases exquisite animation and a surprising mix of gameplay styles, including a rhythm-action section for the iconic 'I've Got No Strings' musical interlude. There's also a level where you get to control the diminutive Jiminy Cricket, and a thrilling escape from the gigantic whale Monstro at the end, with Pinocchio's creator Geppetto in tow.

A late release in the life of the Super Famicom, it would appear that only the barest effort was made in the design of its packaging. The admittedly pretty cover image is lifted directly from the Western version, showing our plucky wooden hero steering his raft away from the jaws of Monstro while Geppetto looks on. The original landscape image wasn't large enough to fill the space, so a large black panel was lazily plonked behind the logo.

POP'N TWINBEE

ポップン ツインビー
KONAMI (1993)
GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

The once mild-mannered scientist Dr. Mardock has received an unfortunate bump to the head and is now hell-bent on subjugating the world with his sinister army of acorn men. His granddaughter Madoka tracks down TwinBee and WinBee in the hope that these heroic craft can help convince her unruly relative to change his ways. Providing simultaneous two-player action, this vertically-scrolling shooter is packed with delicious pastel-shaded visuals and inventive bosses, and feels stylistically similar to Konami's Parodius franchise – in which TwinBee stars as a selectable ship.

The evocative cover art shows Light and Pastel – the pilots of TwinBee and WinBee – along with Madoka, Mardock's granddaughter. The evil doctor is shown at the top of the image, commanding his acorn forces. The series has since been expanded to a cover RPGs, puzzle titles and even a Roguelike called TwinBee Dungeon for mobile devices.





POPEYE IJIWARU MAJO SEA HAG NO MAKI

ポパイ いじわる魔女シーハッグの巻
KING FEATURES SYNDICATE / TECHNOS
JAPAN (1994)
GENRE: PLATFORM ADVENTURE

When the vengeful Seahag turns all of Popeye's pals into stone by removing their hearts, the spinach-loving sailor-man must find the scattered heart pieces to restore his friends to life. This curious platformer uses a board-game format, where the player has to navigate a large map in order to select levels. Once you're in a stage, Popeye controls very much like Super Mario, able to vanquish enemies by jumping on their heads and even donning a frog suit, à la Super Mario Bros. 3. But like any mariner worth his salt, he has his trusty anchor to hand, which can be used as a whip to take out foes.

Boasting artwork inspired by Popeye creator E. C. Segar, this colourful cover for Popeye: Ijiwaru Majo Seahag No Maki features the titular hero and several of his companions, including love interest Olive Oyl and arch-nemesis Brutus (also known as Bluto).

PRINCE OF PERSIA

プリンス オブ ペルシャ
BRØDERBUND / NCS / ARSYS
SOFTWARE / MASAYA (1992)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

The power-mad Grand Vizier Jaffar has taken the Sultan's daughter hostage and intends to claim control of the throne by forcing her to marry him. It falls to an unnamed hero to escape from the palace dungeons and overcome Jaffar's forces in a thrilling race against time. The Super Famicom version of this classic 2D action title offers some notable improvements over the seemingly endless ports available on other systems: you get vastly improved graphics, a gorgeous soundtrack and almost twice as many levels. It's arguably the definitive version of Jordan Mechner's platforming classic.

Resplendent in detail, the cover art for Prince of Persia – illustrated by Katsuya Terada (Blood: The Last Vampire) – is simply glorious. The harem pants-clad prince stands with his back to the viewer, his scimitar held aloft to protect the princess who cowers behind him. The background features some of the game's most difficult opponents, including a reanimated skeleton and the misshapen, monstrous Jaffar himself.



PSYCHO DREAM

サイコドリーム

TELENET JAPAN / RIOT (1992)

GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT



When the young Sayaka Kaori falls into a coma, it's left to 'Diamond Dog' officers Ryo and Maria to use specialised equipment to enter her dreams and wake her from her slumber. What follows is a deliciously weird adventure showcasing demonic enemies and heroes who can change their form by collecting power-ups, eventually becoming insanely strong monsters themselves. Developer Riot – one of Telenet's in-house teams – arguably doesn't have the same lofty reputation as other notable studios of the period, but in Psycho Dream it created one of the most unique and original Super Famicom action platformers. A Western release was planned under the title Dream Probe, but was cancelled seemingly at the last minute, denying a wider audience access to this intriguing game.

Psycho Dream's cover wouldn't look out of place on a 1970's progressive rock album sleeve, and doesn't really give much away about the game contained within. However, it remains a striking piece of art; presented in landscape format, it's made up of the game's title – in English – distorted by bubbles. It's a nice allusion to the title, but bears little relevance to the in-game action.

R-TYPE 3: THE THRD LIGHTNING

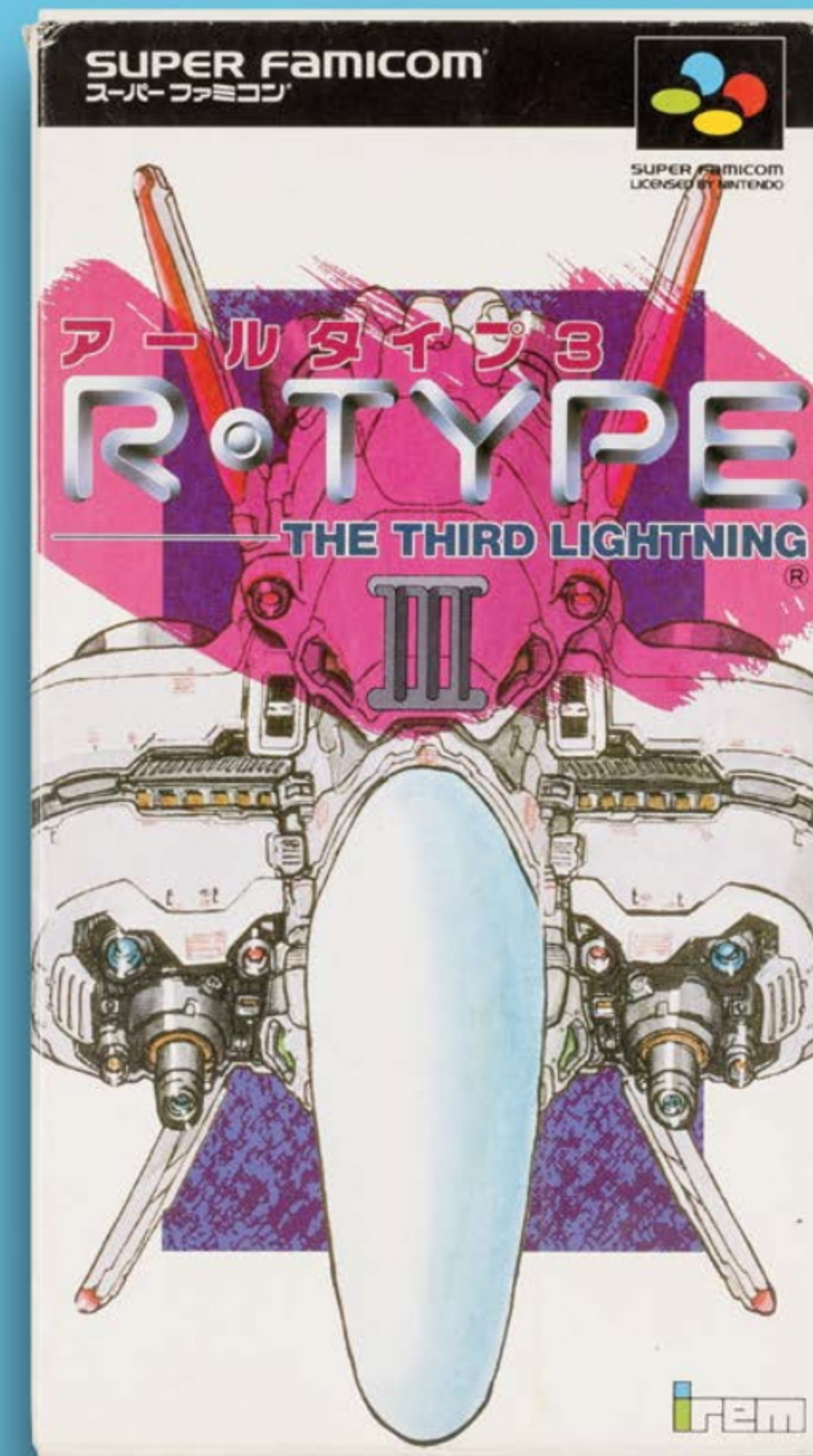
アールタイプ3 ザ・サードライトニング

REM (1993)

GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

The third entry in Irem's legendary R-Type series was notable for being exclusive to Nintendo's 16-bit system, although it was later ported to the Game Boy Advance. The Bydo Empire has returned with a vengeance, and once again humanity must rely on an experimental fighter craft for salvation. This time it's the R-90 Ragnarok, which is capable of housing one of three different 'Force' units and an improved, multi-stage Wave Cannon. Despite the Super Famicom's reputation as a poor platform for fast-paced shooters, R-Type 3 is just as engaging as the arcade titles that preceded it.

The unmistakable form of the R-90 Ragnarok dominates the cover for R-Type 3: The Third Lightning, its huge canopy acting as the focal point of the image. The Japanese fascination with technology and mechanical design shines through with this detailed and stylish piece of art; by contrast, the garish North American cover is an entirely new image, bearing almost no connection with the game or its aesthetics.





RAIDEN DENSETSU

雷電伝説

MICRONICS / SEIBU KAIHATSU /

TOEI ANIMATION (1991)

GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

When the Earth comes under attack from a hostile alien force known as the Cranassians, the world's governments put aside their differences and pool resources to create the ultimate weapon – the Raiden Attack Fighter. Capable of housing a destructive smart bomb and a range of upgradeable weapons, the ship is humanity's only hope against its alien aggressors. Seibu Kaihatsu originally launched this vertically scrolling shooter in arcades in 1990, and a host of console ports followed. Micronics handled the conversion duties for the Super Famicom edition.

The destructive power of the Raiden Attack Fighter is illustrated quite effectively on the game packaging, which depicts the ship performing a colourful strafing run across an alien landscape. This apocalyptic image is replicated on the game's title screen.

RANMA ½: BAKURETSU RANTŌ HEN

らんま1/2 爆烈乱闘篇

ATELIER DOUBLE / SHOGAKUKAN

PRODUCTION / MASAYA (1992)

GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

The second Super Famicom title based on Rumiko Takahashi's incredibly popular manga series, Ranma ½: Bakuretsu Rantō Hen is a one-on-one fighter in the same vein as Capcom's Street Fighter II. Building on the solid if unremarkable template laid down by its prequel Ranma ½: Chōnai Gekitōhen (which was released earlier in 1992), Bakuretsu Rantō Hen boasts more fighters, better controls and generally tighter gameplay. Unlike its forerunner – which was clumsily reskinned for release in North America as Street Combat – this title actually got localised without any visual changes, thanks to the increased popularity of manga and anime in the west at the time.

Rumiko Takahashi's unmistakeable artwork positively shines on the cover of Bakuretsu Rantō Hen, with both the male and female versions of the main character being present. In case you weren't aware, protagonist Ranma Saotome is cursed to change sex when splashed with water – a unique comic hook which makes the manga series so appealing.



RENDERING RANGER R2

レンダリング・レンジャー R2

RAINBOW ARTS / VIRGIN INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT (1995)

GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP



While the plot for Rendering Ranger R2 isn't noteworthy in the slightest – it's your typical one-man-army offering, with a single soldier expected to defend the planet Earth from encroaching aliens – the visuals are nothing short of breathtaking. Created by Manfred Trenz, the German genius behind the Turrican series, Rendering Ranger R2 features pre-rendered computer graphics and intense action. A Japanese exclusive which was apparently limited to just 5,000 copies, it has since become a highly sought-after collector's item.

In keeping with the in-game visuals, the cover of Rendering Ranger R2 features a CG craft, presented in a landscape format. This approach foreshadows the trend for using CG in cover design, which became so prevalent in the 32-bit era. It's a stylish, if somewhat indistinct image, although the addition of a second Rendering Ranger logo in English seems like overkill.

RETURN OF DOUBLE DRAGON

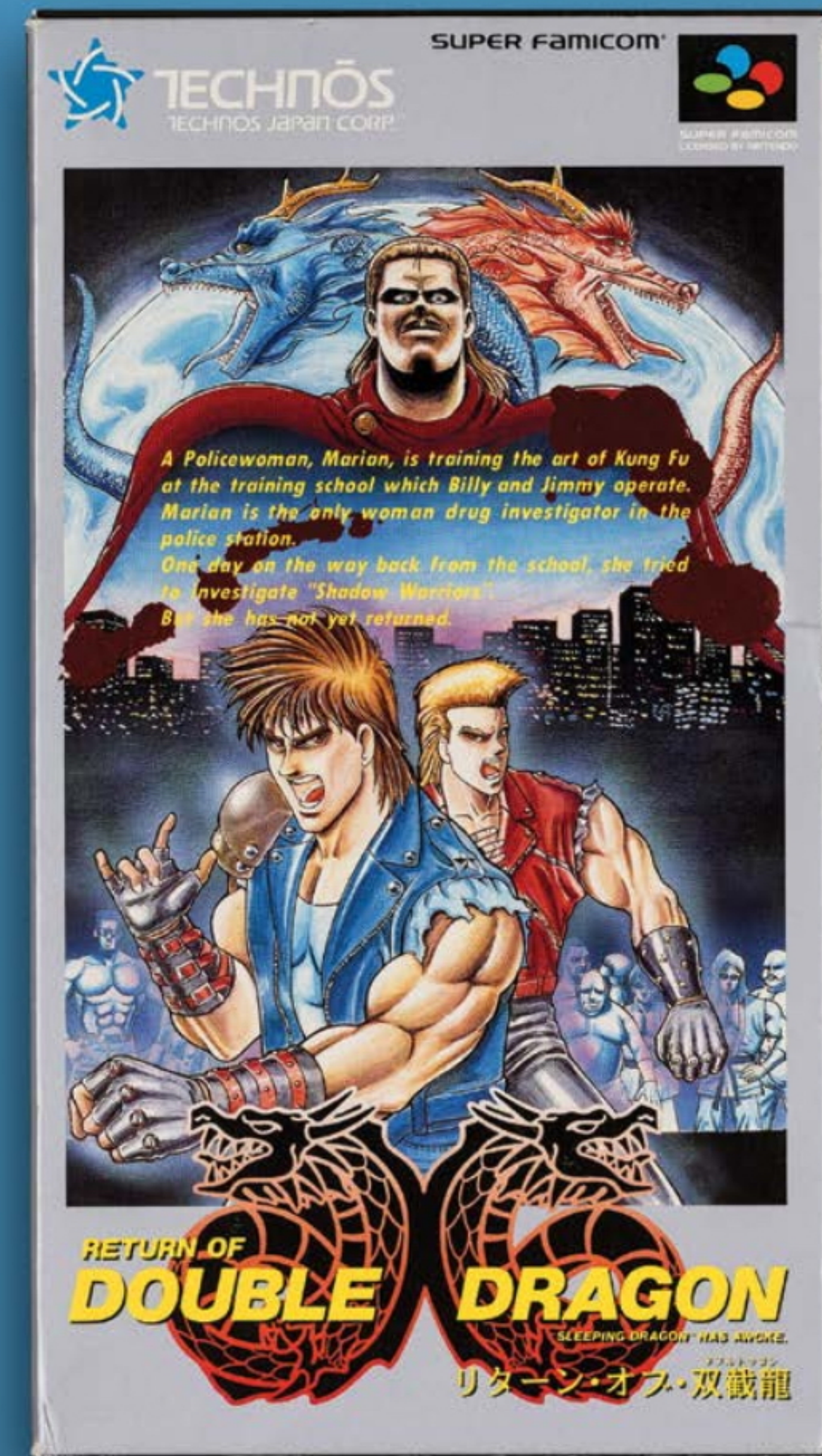
リターン・オブ・双截龍 (ダブルドラゴン)

TECHNOS JAPAN (1992)

GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

Siblings Billy and Jimmy are once again compelled to take the law into their own hands when a ruthless criminal gang, the Shadow Warriors, kidnaps their friend Marian. This Super Famicom exclusive builds on the gameplay made famous in the arcade originals, offering simultaneous two-player action, a host of new moves and even the ability to block and counter various enemy attacks – a fresh tactical option introduced in this outing. Return of Double Dragon was rechristened Super Double Dragon in North America, where it launched before the Japanese edition – thereby lacking some features as a result.

As you might expect, Billy and Jimmy are the focal point for the packaging, looking suitably mean and moody as they prepare to liberate the hapless Marian. The game's final boss – known as The Duke – looms menacingly at the top of the image. The cover is a clumsy mix of logos, dubious-quality artwork, blood splats and a chunk of clumsy English text sitting incongruously in the middle of the image.





ROCKMAN 7 – SHUKUMEI NO TAIKETSU!

ロックマン7 宿命の対決!
CAPCOM (1995)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

Following on from the events depicted in the original 8-bit Rockman games, Rockman 7 sees gaming's most famous robot taking on the sinister and surprisingly resilient Dr. Willy once again. Freshly liberated by his army of android 'Robot Masters', Willy is up to his usual tricks, but Rockman has a little assistance this time around from the enigmatic Forte and his wolf-like companion Gospel. Rockman 7 launched to a rather muted reception back in 1995, as Capcom had already taken the series up a gear with the excellent Rockman X more than a year previously.

A glorious explosion of colour and detail, the cover for Rockman 7 does not disappoint. Our robotic hero is found in the centre of the image, surrounded by a new cast of enemies, Willy's Robot Masters. Rockman is flanked by long-time companions Roll and Rush, while newcomers Forte and Gospel appear at the top of the image, either side of Dr. Willy himself.

ROCKMAN & FORTE

ロックマン&フォルテ
CAPCOM (1998)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

Arriving in 1998, this spin-off from the mainline Rockman series adopts the same tried-and-tested gameplay but allows players to choose between Rockman and Forte, both of whom control very differently. Rockman can charge his shots and perform ground-slides, while Forte can fire in eight directions, double-jump and dash. Borrowing some of the Robot Masters seen in Rockman 8 – which launched on the 32-bit Sony PlayStation in 1996 – Rockman & Forte feels like a bridge release designed to link the two hardware generations. A Game Boy Advance port would follow in 2002, and a semi-sequel arrived on the Bandai WonderSwan in 1999, under the title Rockman & Forte: Mirai kara no Chōsensha.

The cover for Rockman & Forte shows the two main characters standing back to back in defiance of their mysterious new enemy, known only as King. This evil villain is threatening to steal blueprints to Dr. Willy and Dr. Light's most powerful creations and thereby drive the world into chaos.





ROCKMAN X

ロックマンエックス

CAPCOM (1993)

GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

Rockman's first outing on the Super Famicom is quite a significant one – it established a new sub-series for the franchise which has gone on to become incredibly popular among fans. Set after the events of the mainline Rockman series and boasting a new protagonist, Rockman X is concerned with a new breed of robot equipped with free will – dubbed 'Reploids' – and a virus which turns them into evil 'Irregulars' that attack humans. As you might expect, the new hero X cannot stand idly by as this happens and, along with cohorts Axl and Zero, fearlessly takes on the forces of evil to protect humanity.

Rockman X's cover shows the new and somewhat harder-edged visual style, which has characterised the sub-series since its inception. Primary antagonist Sigma is a key focal point, waving cheerily behind X, while Zero zooms into the scene from the left.

ROCKMAN X2

ロックマンエックス2

CAPCOM (1994)

GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

Six months after the defeat of the nefarious Sigma in the original game, X discovers that the 'Irregular' attacks have not ceased, and is soon taunted by fresh foes who have stolen the body parts of his fallen comrade, Zero. One of the big innovations in this sequel is the ability to pilot vehicles, including a massive robot and hover bike. This game also benefits from the additional processing power afforded by the Cx4 chip, which was built into the cartridge and allows for surprisingly effective 3D wireframe visuals – most notably used to depict the final boss, Sigma Virus.

Comfortably out-doing its predecessor when it comes to busy artwork, the cover for Rockman X2 is practically bursting with detail. Again, it features X in the centre of the image, surrounded by the many 'Irregular' robots he has to deal with during the course of his quest. Closer inspection reveals the shadowy face of Sigma in the background, a hint that he is somehow involved in the plot to steal Zero's defunct body. The image's joyful, vibrant nature is more in line with the earlier Rockman series.





ROCKMAN X3

ロックマンエックス3

CAPCOM (1995)

GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

After triumphing over the megalomaniac Sigma and his band of ruthless 'Irregulars' not once but twice, X suddenly finds himself living in a period of relative peace thanks to the efforts of Reploid scientist Dr Doppler, who claims to have found a vaccine which prevents androids from going rogue. However, when attacks resume in Dopple Town – a commune of reformed Reploid beings established by the doctor – X and the other Irregular Hunters have no choice but to take action. Like its forerunners, Rockman X3 comes equipped with the Cx4 chip, which manifests itself in transparency effects and limited 3D wireframe visuals.

X and his companion Zero are found at the centre of Rockman X3's artwork, taking the fight to the freshly-corrupted hordes of Irregular androids. Dr. Doppler – who begins the game as the primary antagonist but atones for his misdeeds by its conclusion – overlooks the scene. This final entry in the Rockman X series ups the ante with a dynamic, slightly more mature illustration style.

ROKUDENASHI BLUES:

TAIKETSU! TOKYO SHITENNŌ

ろくでなし ブルース 対決! 東京四天王

TOSE / BANDAI (1994)

GENRE: ADVENTURE / BEAT 'EM UP

Based on Masanori Morita's manga of the same name, Rokudenashi Blues: Taiketsu! Tokyo Shitennō combines one-on-one fighting action with a surprisingly deep storyline. Main character Taison Maeda is a delinquent student at Teiken High who wants to be world boxing champion. The story follows his efforts to become one of the 'Four Heavenly Kings' – the strongest fighters in Tokyo – but the plot covers a wide range of topics and is packed with moments of genuine humour. The combat segments might not possess the same depth and kinetic energy of Street Fighter or Fatal Fury, but they do offer up some welcome innovations – for example, on one of the stages it's possible to throw your opponent off-balance by hurling a handful of dirt in their eyes.

Taison Maeda dominates the cover artwork, a James Dean-esque character seemingly with the weight of the world on his young shoulders. Beneath the main portrait he stands surrounded by his high school classmates, a moody looking bunch with indifferent scowls on their faces.



RUDRA NO HIHŌ

ルドラの秘宝
SQUARE (1996)
GENRE: RPG



Notable for being Square's final RPG for the Super Famicom, Rudra no Hihō takes inspiration from Indian religions, such as Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. The story is set during the final 15 days of the human race, and sees player control passing between four different characters. It's possible to switch freely from one character to another, and events that occur in one story thread are reflected in the others. Another unique aspect is the magic system, which builds on the rune-based setup seen in FTL's seminal Dungeon Master, allowing players to create spells using a combination of words, known as 'Mantras'. This complex magic system is one of the reasons the game was never officially localised for release outside of its native Japan: it would have presented a herculean task that would simply not have been worthwhile in 1996, with the SNES on its last legs.

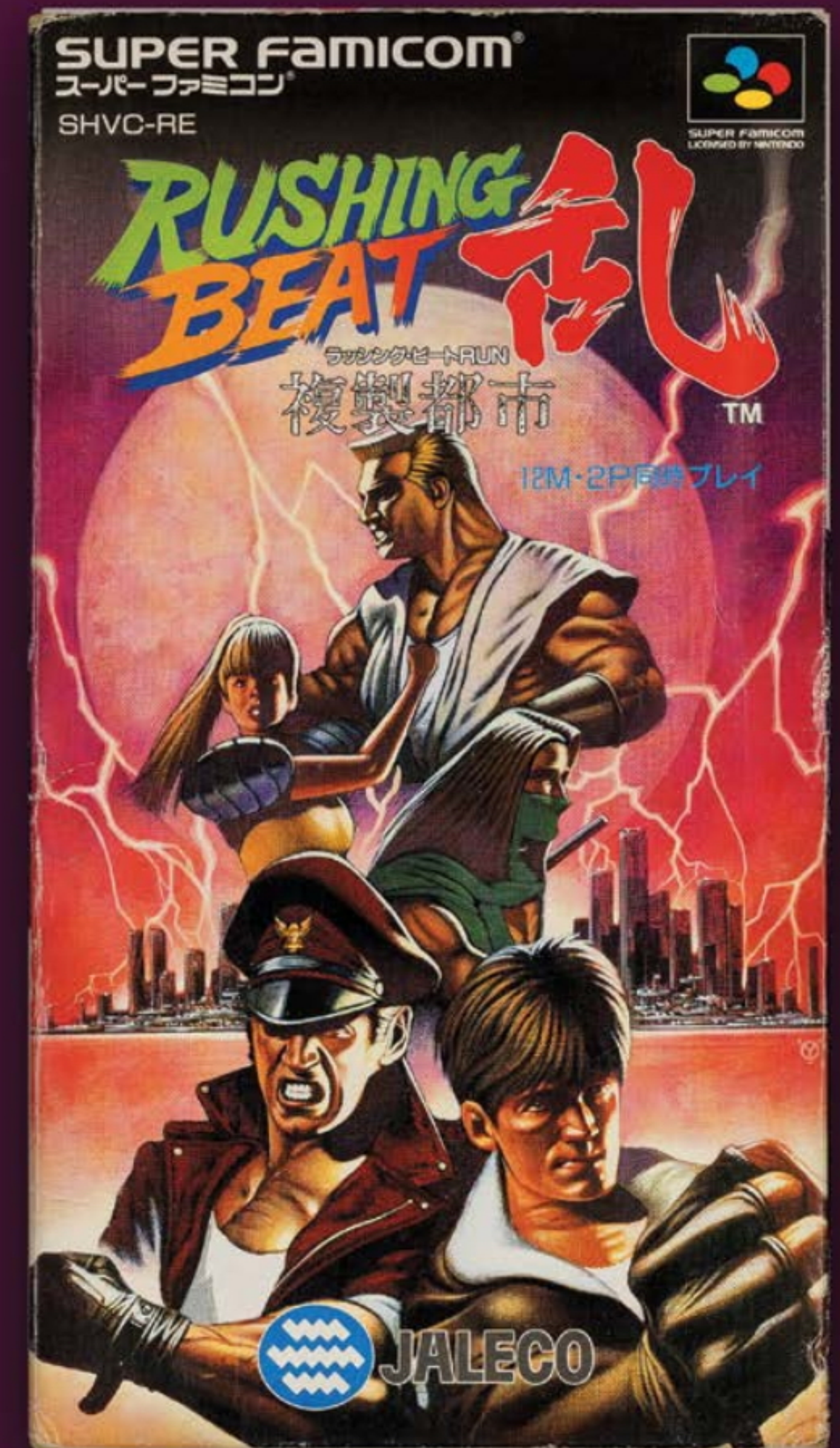
Keita Amemiya's unique fantasy style gives Rudra no Hihō a flavour all its own, and this carries over to the game's sumptuous cover art. The landscape-format cover shows the four heroes – the soldier Sion, priestess Riza, hermit Surlent and thief Dune – with their weapons drawn, presumably ready to tackle the eradication of humanity, an event which is said to happen every 4,000 years at the hands of the Hindu God of destruction, Shiva. It's a wonderfully evocative piece, aided by some interesting typography.

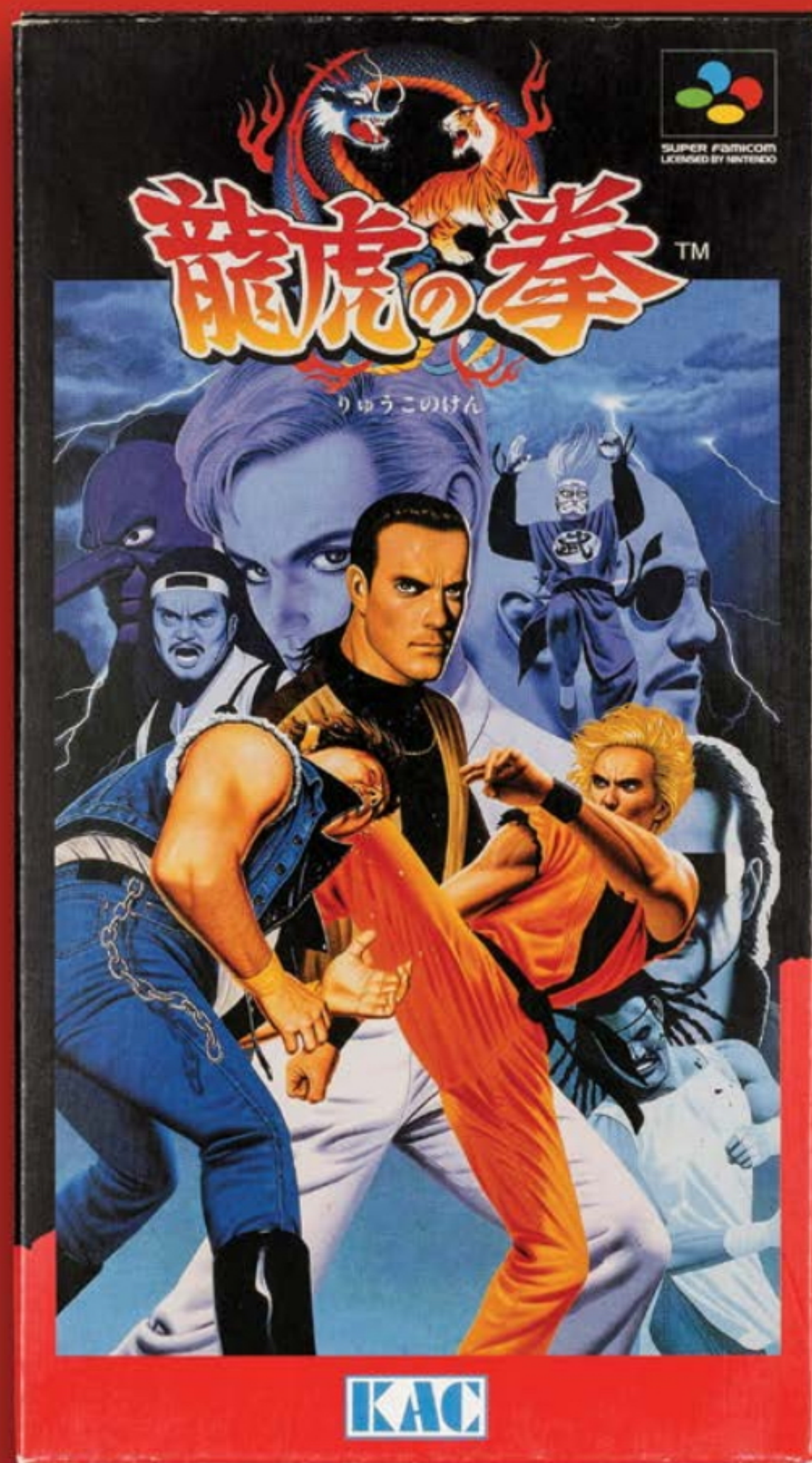
RUSHING BEAT RUN: FUKUSEI TOSHI

ラッシング・ビート乱 複製都市
JALECO (1992)
GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

The heroes of the original Rushing Beat return in this vastly-improved sequel, which pits Rick Norton and Douglas Bild – who are joined by Judo master Lord J, the mysterious ninja Kazan and the female wrestler Wendy – against the clone forces of the evil scientist Iceman. Taking place over four surprisingly lengthy levels, Rushing Beat Run offers many refinements over its forerunner, including tighter controls, plus more variety in the enemies and playable characters which all behave very differently, with their own unique strengths and weaknesses. In the West, it was localised under the title Brawl Brothers.

There's plenty of machismo to be had with Rushing Beat Run's mean and moody cover, as our five protagonists pose dramatically in front of a city backdrop, the moon looming ominously behind. It's a classy and well-balanced piece of art with great use of colour.





RYŪKO NO KEN

龍虎の拳

SNK / K. AMUSEMENT LEASING CO. (1993)

GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

Renamed as Art of Fighting in the West, Ryūko no Ken (Fist of Dragon and Tiger) is set in the same fictional world as the Fatal Fury series. It follows the story of Karate students Ryo Sakazaki, son of the creator of Kyokugenryu Karate, and Robert Garcia, an Italian billionaire playboy. After Ryo and his father refuse an offer to work for the city's crime boss, Mr. Big, he kidnaps Ryo's sister, Yuri, in an attempt to force them to join his syndicate. Ryo and Robert team up to find Yuri by searching the streets of South Town and fighting their way to the very top of the city's criminal underworld.

The Super Famicom box uses the original Neo Geo art for its cover. It was illustrated by Japanese illustrator Shinkirō (aka Toshiaki Mori), an SNK-employed artist who regularly provided designs for SNK games, including The King of Fighters, Fatal Fury and Samurai Spirits series. With its plot set in 1978, Shinkirō's character designs pay tribute to some of the era's iconic fashions, from Robert Garcia's white chinos and medallion to Mr. Big's street-pimp attire.

SAMURAI SPIRITS

サムライスピリッツ (侍魂)

SNK / TAKARA (1994)

GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

Set in 18th century Japan – during a period when the country was largely cut off from foreign influence and suffering at the hands of a nationwide famine – Samurai Spirits is a one-on-one fighter with a difference. Instead of relying entirely on their fists, the combatants utilise a range of weapons, with the vast majority of the cast favouring blades of various shapes and sizes. One of the first titles to really capitalise on the popularity of one-on-one fighters after Street Fighter II, Samurai Spirits (known as Samurai Shodown in the West) was ported to pretty much every home format of the period. The Super Famicom edition is notable for boasting the character Earthquake, who was expunged entirely from the Sega Mega Drive version.

The cover of Samurai Spirits is graced with the distinctive ink artwork of Shiroy Eiji – aka Jin Mera – who designed all the game characters. Shiroy's style takes inspiration from Japanese calligraphy, and the characters depicted here are formed from flowing lines, denoting movement and fluidity.





SANGOKUSHI IV

三国志IV
KOEI (1994)
GENRE: TURN-BASED STRATEGY

Based on the 14th century book The Romance of the Three Kingdoms by Luo Guanzhong, Sangokushi IV is a turn-based strategy game featuring famous individuals from Chinese history. Released in the West as Romance of the Three Kingdoms IV: Wall of Fire, the game is regarded as one of the most accessible in the series and certainly played a big role in popularising the franchise outside of Japan. Ports to the 3DO, Saturn, PlayStation, Dreamcast, 32X and PC all followed the initial Super Famicom launch in 1994.

The cover of Sangokushi IV does an excellent job of setting the scene, boasting lavish artwork by Noriyoshi Ohrai, which depicts the famous warlords whose exploits are portrayed within. Ohrai, who passed away in 2015, was responsible for many other covers in Koei's catalogue, and gained universal fame for creating the international poster for the release of Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back in 1980.

SEIJŪ MADEN – BEASTS & BLADES

聖獣魔伝 ビースト&ブレイド
ORG / BULLET-PROOF SOFTWARE (1995)
GENRE: STRATEGY



Based on a published 'play-by-mail' reader-participation RPG by Media Works, this swords and sorcery-themed strategy title takes place during a never-ending war between the gods of light and darkness. This conflict, known as the 'Holy Magic War' takes place on Earth over the course of several thousand years. The gods choose tribes to represent the Light and Dark, and these tribes consist of warriors, sorcerers, humans and beasts. Alliance to the gods is ever changing and both man and beast have fought as allies and as well as enemies.

This striking cover is by Ayumi Konomichi, the creator of manga serial Pillow Talk Gundam: Night Hawks and a contributor to Wedding Peach. This landscape design makes great use of colour by casting a stone-cut-style logo in electric blue against the warm oranges of the backdrop, bringing equal focus to both branding and content. The composition of characters on the right of the box is reminiscent of 1980s-era cinema posters, hinting at the sense of story and grandness the game might entail.



SEIKEN DENSETSU 2

聖剣伝説2
SQUARESOFT (1993)
GENRE: RPG

Holy Sword Legend 2, otherwise known as Secret of Mana, was a genre defining role-playing game of the 16-bit era. It was the second game in the series for Japanese audiences, but was the first and only instalment to be released in the West. It follows three heroes, Randi, the game's central character, Popoi, a woodland sprite and Primm the magician, as they attempt to prevent an evil empire from conquering the world, led by the dark sorcerer Thanatos. Our heroes must recover Mana orbs, and by doing so harness the power of the mythical Mana Sword. With the strength of the sword, Randi and his companions can fight to save the world from darkness and defeat Thanatos and the Mana Beast.

A cropped landscape version of this cover was used for the Super Nintendo release. However the true detail of this beautiful painting by Hiro Isono is only revealed in full on the Japanese portrait box. This version reveals the full height of the Mana tree as it towers over our three heroes. Intricate, pattern-like art deco detail and intense green hues are contrasted with warm flecks of orange that lead our eyes gently toward the base of the painting. A timeless, masterpiece of video game cover art.

SENGOKU DENSHŌ

戦国伝承
SNK / DATA EAST (1993)
GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

When an evil warlord is defeated by two courageous samurai, he vows to return in the future to finish what he started. Centuries later that dire prophecy comes to pass, and the maniacal monster floods the modern world with undead soldiers. It falls to a Japanese warrior and American cowboy – descendants of the two samurai who defeated the warlord hundreds of years previously – to tackle the threat. Based on the 1991 Neo Geo side-scrolling fighter and developed by Data East, Sengoku Denshō on the Super Famicom is almost an entirely different game to its arcade parent, with redrawn visuals, new music, a rejigged power-up system and other gameplay changes.

Just like the extensively retooled game itself, Sengoku Denshō gets new box artwork for its Super Famicom release. The two heroes are front and centre, flanked by their opponents and with the warlord's floating castle drifting in the background. The game's content is replicated quite effectively in this new artwork.



SEPTENTRION

セブテントリオン

FIELD / HUMAN ENTERTAINMENT (1993)
GENRE: PLATFORM ADVENTURE



Borrowing elements from the 1972 Hollywood movie *The Poseidon Adventure*, *Septentrion* places you aboard the doomed ocean liner *Lady Crithania*. Four characters are selectable, and each has a special individual on-board who, if rescued, can secure a more positive ending. The Super Famicom's Mode 7 mode is put to excellent use to portray the inexorable listing of the massive, sinking ship, forcing the player to think on their feet in order to navigate the sloping decks and save as many survivors as possible. Released in the west under the title *S.O.S.* and later remade for the Sony PlayStation, *Septentrion* has become something of a cult classic over the past few decades.

Arguably one of the most dramatic and evocative covers in the Super Famicom library, *Septentrion*'s packaging displays a painting of the *Lady Crithania* being battered by the gigantic wave that capsizes her and triggers the player's scramble for survival.

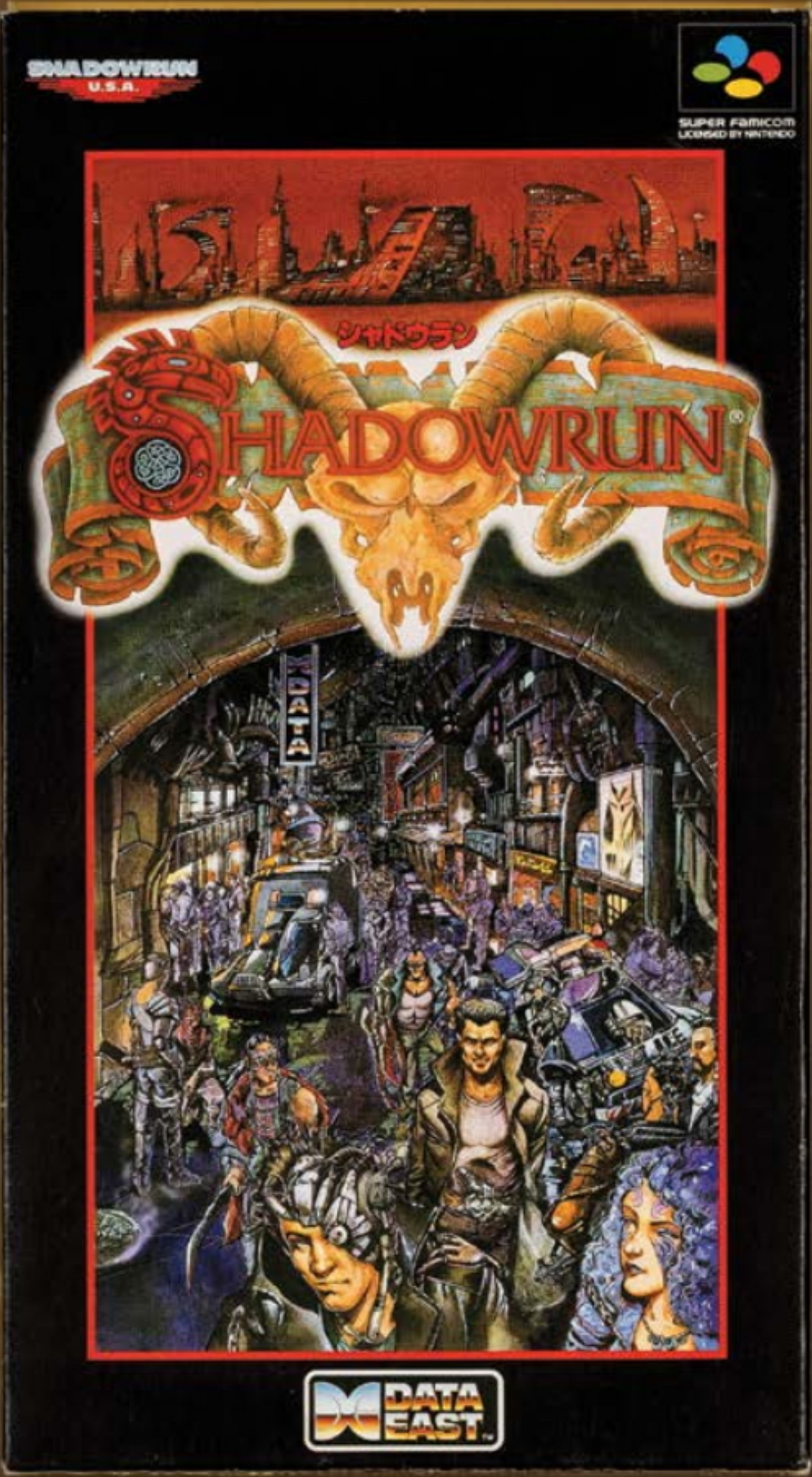
SHADOWRUN

シャドウラン

BEAM SOFTWARE / FASA /
DATA EAST (1994)
GENRE: RPG

Set in 2050, the events of *Shadowrun* are triggered by the merciless killing of data courier, Jake Armitage, who's resurrected by a shapeshifter but has no memory of his former life. Like the tabletop role-playing series on which it's based, *Shadowrun* exists in a world where technology and magic share an uneasy coexistence, and mastering both is absolutely essential to survival. Armitage must slowly piece together the reason for his brutal murder and subsequent revival while avoiding the unwanted attention of the various criminals and monsters which stalk the rain-soaked streets of near-future Seattle.

Bursting with detail, the comic book-style tech-noir cover art hints at the intriguing mix of sci-fi and fantasy contained within. In a scene that wouldn't look out of place in Ridley Scott's seminal movie *Blade Runner*, 'Deckers' rub shoulders with cyberware-enhanced magicians and cannon-packing mercenaries.





SHIEN: THE BLADE CHASER

紫炎 ザ・ブレイドチェイサー
ALMANIC / DYNAMIC (1994)
GENRE: ON-RAILS SHOOT 'EM UP

With character design by the near-legendary Go Nagai (Cutie Honey, Devilman, Mazinger Z), Shien: The Blade Master is a rail shooter which swaps bullets for shurikens. The titular Shien is a ninja master who enters a time gate to rescue his girlfriend Aska from the sinister Undertaker, using a combination of throwing stars and his kunai dagger. The action takes place from a first-person perspective with the player controlling Shien's attacks via a cursor. In a neat touch, it's possible to use the Super Famicom mouse or a light gun instead of the standard controller, with the latter option turning the game into a more traditional arcade-style rail shooter. Power-ups include a rapid-fire option and scrolls which act as a smart bomb, clearing the screen of enemies.

Considering that Shien: The Blade Chaser spans many different time periods and sees you facing off against Genghis Khan and Nazi soldiers, its cover art is somewhat restrained. Shien and his beloved Aska are flanked by various monsters, including a snake-like beast which handily forms a circle, framing the two characters and unifying the overall design.

SHIN KIDO SENKI GUNDAM W: ENDLESS DUEL

新機動戦記ガンダムW
GUNDAMWING: ENDLESS DUEL
NATSUME / BANDAI (1996)
GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

Gundam Wing: Endless Duel (for short) is a one-one-one fighting game, based on the Japanese animation series that ran from 1995 to 1996. However the developers chose to focus on the series' range of characters, rather than adhering closely to the plot of the television show. The game's playable characters include Heero Yuy and his Gundam Wing, Duo Maxwell and Gundam Deathscythe, Trowa Barton piloting Gundam Heavy Arms, Zechs Marquise with Tallgeese and many more. Each Mobile Suit features boosters for air combat and the game is notable for the inclusion of vertically scrolling stages.

Wing Zero and Epyon are pictured on the box art battling in outer space in this generic anime-style illustration. Gundam W's artwork may not be as inspiring as some of the other instalments (a total of 21 Gundam games were released on the Super Famicom), but what lies within the box is one of the greatest Gundam games ever developed and a high point in the long list of Super Famicom Gundam titles. The game features some of the best pixel art seen on the system, along with fantastic animation and gameplay.





SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI

真・女神転生
ATLUS (1992)
GENRE: RPG

A portal to the demon world has opened in Tokyo, compelling the United States to unleash a nuclear attack in an attempt to seal it. The game's unnamed protagonist is magically transported to an alternate dimension to avoid destruction, and eventually finds himself 30 years in the future, in a world decimated by the invading demons and in which two warring factions have emerged. The futuristic setting and Kazuma Kaneko's unique enemy designs makes a refreshing change to the typical turn-based RPG template. This third entry in the Megami Tensei series went on to become one of the biggest names in the genre, spawning numerous critically and commercially successful spin-offs and sequels; an anglicised iOS version was released in 2014.

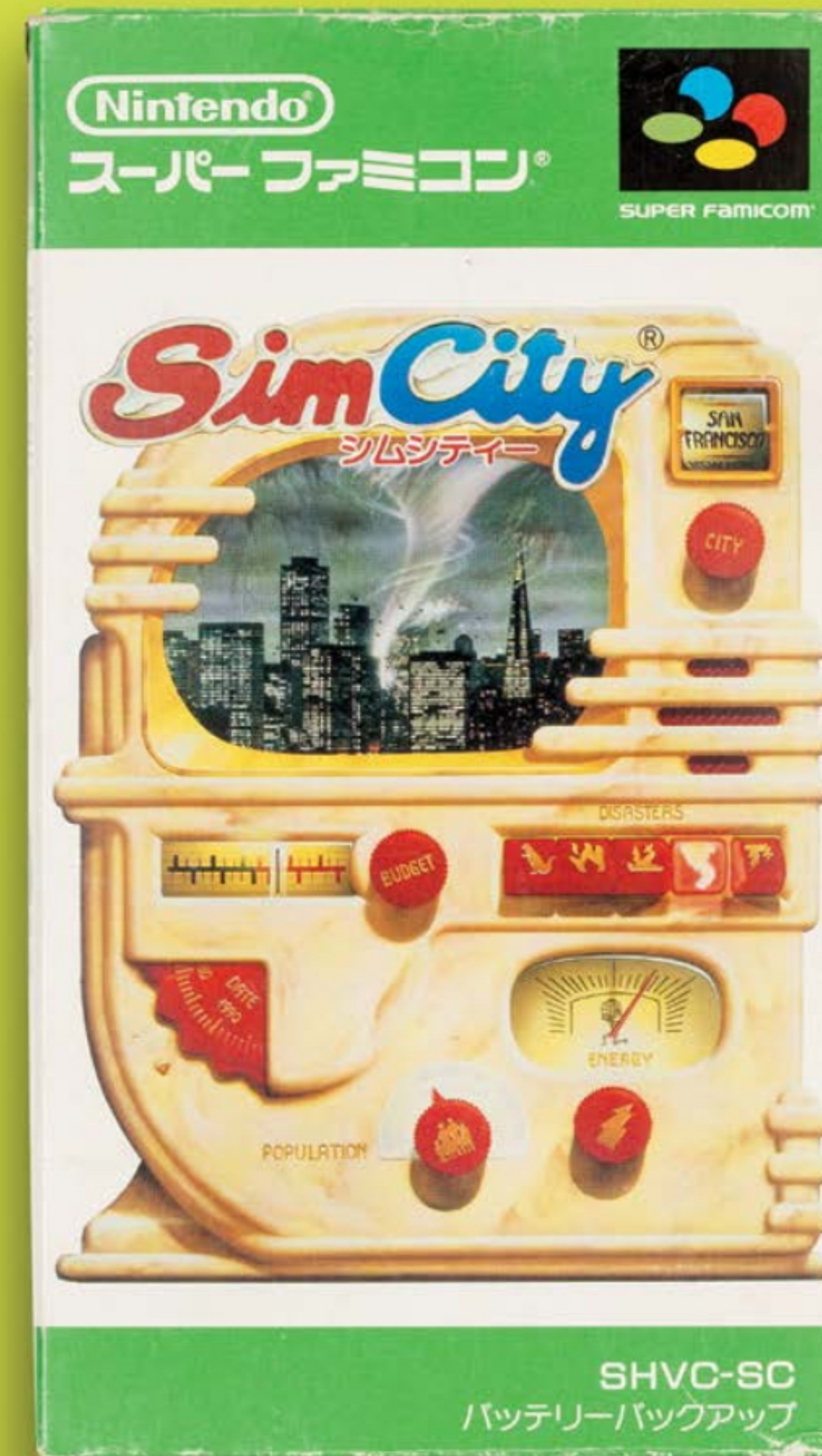
Shin Megami Tensei's deliciously dark cover does a fantastic job of conveying the strangeness of the game, showing three of the hero characters dwarfed by a legion of demons and monsters. During the course of the game, many of these creatures can be recruited to fight by your side.

SIM CITY

シムシティ
INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS / MAXIS /
NINTENDO (1991)
GENRE: STRATEGY

Building and maintaining a bustling metropolis is no easy task, but it's what you're expected to do in Will Wright's complex and demanding city-building simulator, SimCity. The obtuse and visually drab 1989 original might not seem like the ideal candidate for a console release, but this early Super Famicom offering illustrates what a massive difference the 'Nintendo Touch' can make to a game concept. The detail is still there, but the interface has been streamlined, the visuals livened up and likeable characters introduced – including Dr. Wright, the first of many helpful advisers who would star in later editions of the game. In another neat touch, Mario's arch-nemesis Bowser makes an appearance as a monster which sometimes appears to attack your burgeoning town.

Unlike the Western version of the game, which featured entirely new artwork, the cover of the Super Famicom edition recycles the retro-futuristic control system used on some versions of the original 1989 home computer release. It's a unique and memorable piece of video game art based on the design of a 1950s Bakelite radio.



SNOOPY CONCERT

スヌーピーコンサート

FAX SOFTNICA / NINTENDO R&D1 / MITSUI FUDOSAN / DENTSU

GENRE: VARIOUS



Based on the cast of Peanuts characters created by Charles M. Schulz, Snoopy Concert sees the player assume control of the small yellow bird Woodstock and Charlie Brown's faithful pooch Snoopy, with the ultimate aim being the formation of a tight musical act for the titular concert. The game makes use of the Super Famicom mouse, and each character has their own self-contained mini-game – some involve races, while others require the player to guide an individual to a particular location. Nintendo R&D1 was involved with development, and the soundtrack is co-written by Hirokazu 'Hip' Tanaka, famous for his work on Mother, Kid Icarus and Metroid.

Snoopy Concert's landscape cover features the unmistakable artwork of Charles M. Schulz, with the character Schroeder sat at his beloved piano as Woodstock leaps playfully from his head. Meanwhile, Snoopy dances happily to the tune. With bold outlined figures and vivid red backdrop, it's a striking cover, made all the better for a lack of intrusive logos or branding.

SŌKŌ KIHEI VOTOMS – THE BATTLING ROAD

装甲騎兵ボトムズ ザ・バトリングロード

GENKI / TAKARA (1993)

GENRE: ACTION

Armoured Trooper VOTOMS – The Battling Road is loosely based on the '80s military sci-fi anime, with mech designs by Kunio Okawara (VOTOMS stands for Vertical One-man Tank for Offense and Manoeuvres). We play as a Gilgamesh Confederation pilot as he fights against the Red Shoulder army. The action is presented from a third-person perspective, using Mode 7 graphics to manipulate a pseudo-3D landscape.

This dramatic painting has our hero in front of his ATM-09-ST mech. The rough brush strokes create a motion blur effect, adding a sense of movement and leading the eye towards our orange-clad hero.





SONIC BLAST MAN

ソニックブラストマン

DISCO / TAITO (1992)

GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

The original arcade version of Sonic Blast Man featured a punch pad which players had to hit as hard as possible to register damage on-screen – a feature which naturally could not be faithfully replicated in a home conversion. Instead, Disco – a brand established by Taito in order to circumvent Nintendo's publishing rules – produced a Final Fight-style side-scrolling brawler featuring the same hero, with bonus stages loosely based on the punch-throwing gameplay of the coin-op. Sonic Blast Man can deliver combos, grab enemies and unleash a super-powerful 'D. Punch', but sadly the game is a solo affair, with the two-player mode absent.

The main character dominates the game's cover, with an amusingly goofy appearance that helps to create a colourful and visually arresting image. This bold comic art illustration is certainly more favourable than the one used on the North American edition, which resembles a poster for a bad, low-budget sci-fi movie.

SONIC BLAST MAN II

ソニックブラストマンII

TL / TAITO (1994)

GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

Sonic Blast Man II improves on its forerunner in practically every respect. It offers a two-player option – something that was sorely missed in the original – and introduces two additional playable characters in the shape of the swift female warrior Sonia and the sluggish but powerful Captain Choyear. It's also possible to dash and dodge out of trouble, which means the player has additional flexibility during battle. Thankfully, Taito resisted the urge to toughen up the game and it retains its gloriously silly sense of humour.

Sonic Blast Man makes room for his new companions on this light-hearted cover image, with Sonia, Captain Choyear and our titular hero finding time during their quest to protect the Earth from alien aggressors to pose for a quick group shot.



SONIC WINGS

ソニックウイングス
VIDEO SYSTEM (1993)
GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP



Adapted from the 1992 vertically-scrolling shooter by Video System, Sonic Wings – known as Aero Fighters in the West – boasts real-world planes facing off against a bewildering selection of military hardware. Power-ups increase the potency of your shots, and smart bombs can be used to clear the screen of enemies when you’re in a pinch. The Super Famicom port is relatively close to its arcade parent, with one of the biggest changes being the narrower field of view – the coin-op edition had a tall and thin display, while the home edition naturally has to fit within the confines of the standard 4:3 TV image of the era.

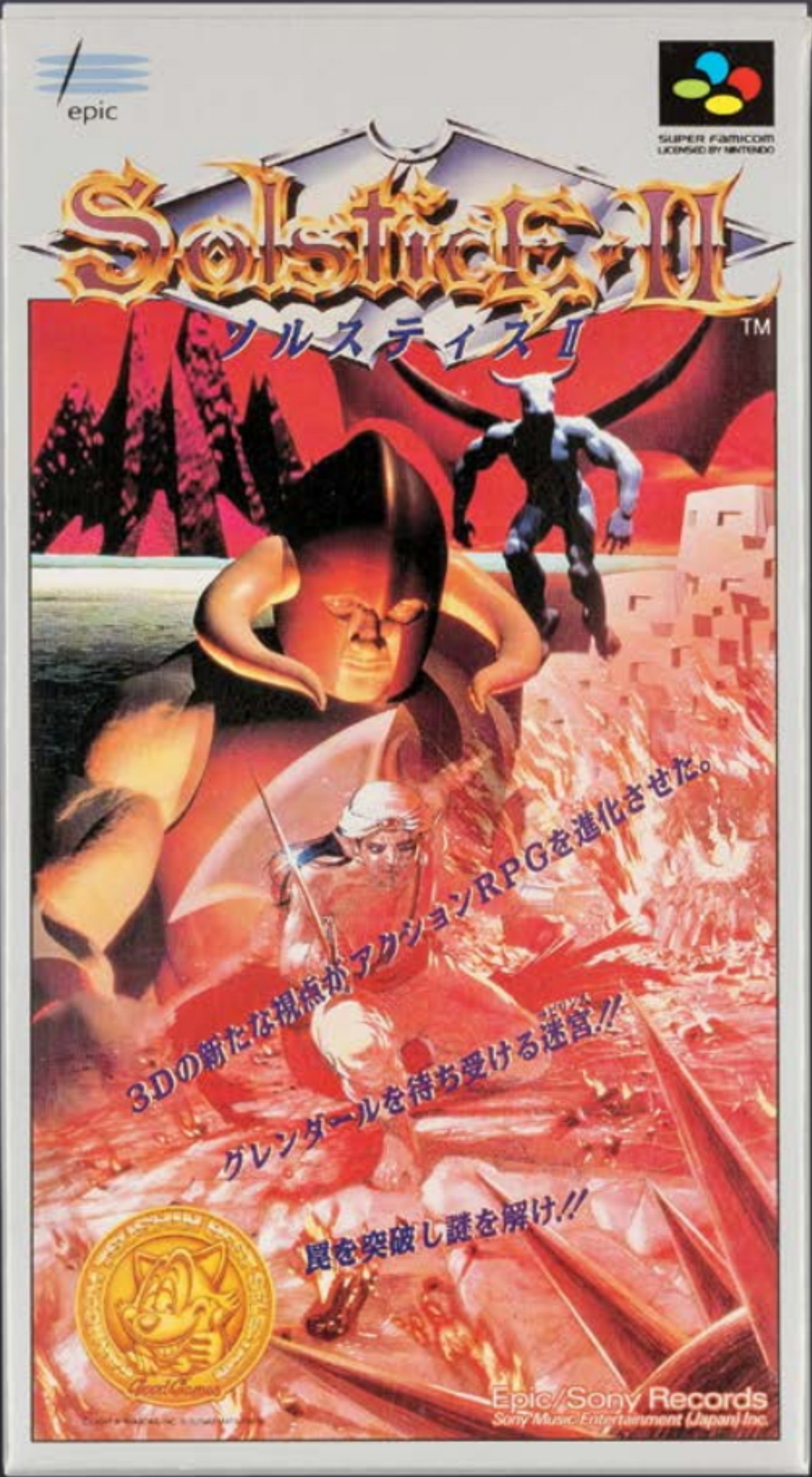
Sonic Wings has a landscape-orientated box design, showing an image of a pilot in the cockpit of their fighter plane. Also included on the cover are portraits of the hero characters – Keaton and Keith (USA), Hien and Mao Mao (Japan), Kohful and Tee-Bee (Sweden) and Villiam and Lord White (Great Britain). Rabio and Lepus, two characters from Video System’s shooter Rabio Lepus, are also included in the game via a secret code, but are absent from on the cover.

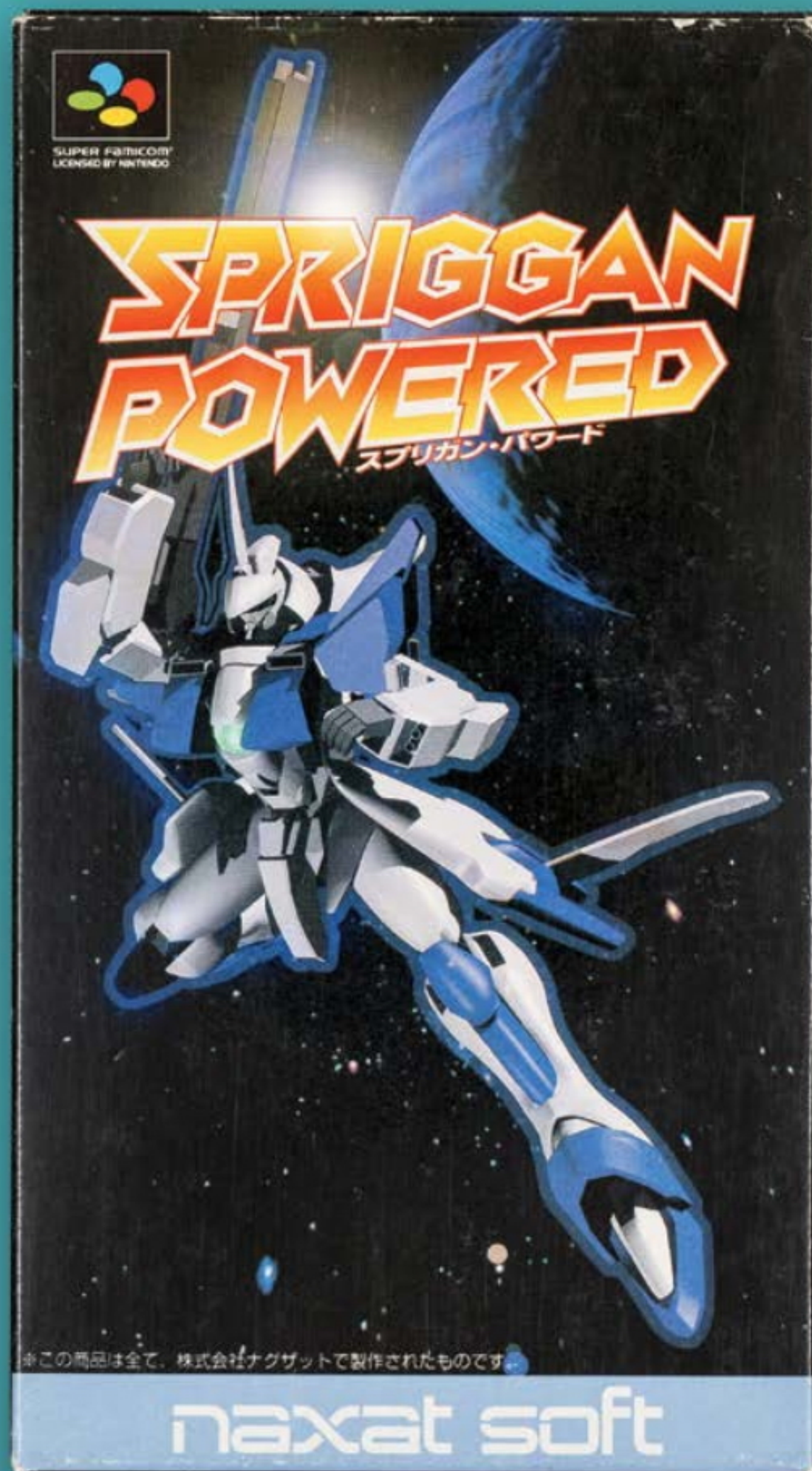
SOLSTICE II

ソルステイスII
SOFTWARE CREATIONS /
EPIC/SONY RECORDS (1993)
GENRE: PUZZLE ADVENTURE

Sequel to the 1990 NES title Solstice: The Quest for the Staff of Demnos, Solstice II is an action puzzle title that adopts the same isometric perspective as its predecessor. Hero Glendaal has to rescue Shadax – the lead of the original game – from the evil sorceress Sonia by collecting orbs from a series of hazard-filled rooms. Once 12 orbs have been collected, the player can summon a boss character whose defeat grants access to the next area. Developed in the United Kingdom by brothers Ste and John Pickford, the game was titled Equinox for its North American and European releases.

The box art for Solstice II is interesting to say the least; it’s a bizarre composite of two entirely different images. The lower half features a reasonably faithful painting of Glendaal with his blade unsheathed, ready to pounce at an unseen enemy. Meanwhile the upper half is dominated by an in-vogue CG render, featuring an axe-wielding warrior, a winged demon and some mountains, none of which feature in the game. For once, the U.S. and U.K. editions fared much better, with good quality illustrations for both.





SPRIGGAN POWERED

スプリガン・パワード
NAXAT SOFT (1996)
GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

Sporting pre-rendered visuals in the tradition of Donkey Kong Country, this horizontally-scrolling 2D shooter is part of a sub-series that started life on the PC Engine CD-ROM under the title Seirei Senshi Spriggan – which, along with its sequel Spriggan Mark 2 – was developed by shooter expert Compile, best known for the Aleste series. Spriggan Powered, on the other hand, was created by Naxat Soft and features massive, Gundam-style robots engaging in all manner of aerial combat. A Japan-exclusive, it was available as a boxed cartridge version and also via the Satellaview broadcast system.

The cover features a CG render of the hero robot out in the depths of space (even though a lot of the in-game action takes place against colourful landscapes). The addition of a thick blue keyline around the mech helps to add a comic book feel to the illustration.

STARDUST SUPLEX

スターダストスープレックス
VARIE (1995)
GENRE: WRESTLING

Women's wrestling has been poorly served in video gaming, with only a handful of examples making it to market. Notable examples from the 16-bit era include Cutie Suzuki no Ringside Angel on the Sega Mega Drive, and Stardust Suplex, a 1995 Super Famicom effort from Varie. While it lacks real-life wrestlers, it takes a leaf out of Fire Pro Wrestling's book by blatantly cloning actual Japanese female grapplers. Plenty of modes are included – such as four-player elimination battles and tag matches – and the level of depth is commendable: characters have entrance costumes and each one exudes a personality that makes them unique from their counterparts – which was quite an achievement when you consider that Varie didn't have real-world personalities to leverage.

The world of women's wrestling in Japan is one of bizarre extremes, with some combatants being the very stereotype of glamorous femininity, while others are aggressive, mohawked warriors. The cover for Stardust Suplex combines both of these extremes, showcasing six of the featured grapplers in a packed arena environment. The accomplished anime-style artwork could easily be mistaken for an existing TV series.





STAR FOX

スターフォックス
ARGONAUT SOFTWARE /
NINTENDO (1993)
GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

When the freedom of the Lylat System is threatened by deranged scientist Andross, Planet Corneria calls upon the mercenary Star Fox team, headed up by the heroic Fox McCloud. Along with Falco Lombardi, Peppy Hare and Slippy Toad, Fox takes to the skies in his experimental Arwing fighter with the express intention of taking down the massive armada assembled by Andross. The objective is the planet Venom, where the unhinged villain has established his base of operations. The game cartridge was notable for the inclusion of the Super FX chip; designed by Argonaut Software in the U.K., it employed a custom-made RISC processor to help render the solid polygonal 3D graphics.

Star Fox's cover features the four heroes photographed in puppet form because producer Shigeru Miyamoto was a big fan of shows like Thunderbirds in his younger years, and hoped that the game could be transformed into a similar TV series. Behind the cast, we see the now-iconic Arwing craft, rendered here as a scale model. According to Miyamoto, the Arwing's angular design was a limitation of the 3D tech the team were working with – anything more complex was simply not possible, even with the innovative Super FX chip on board.

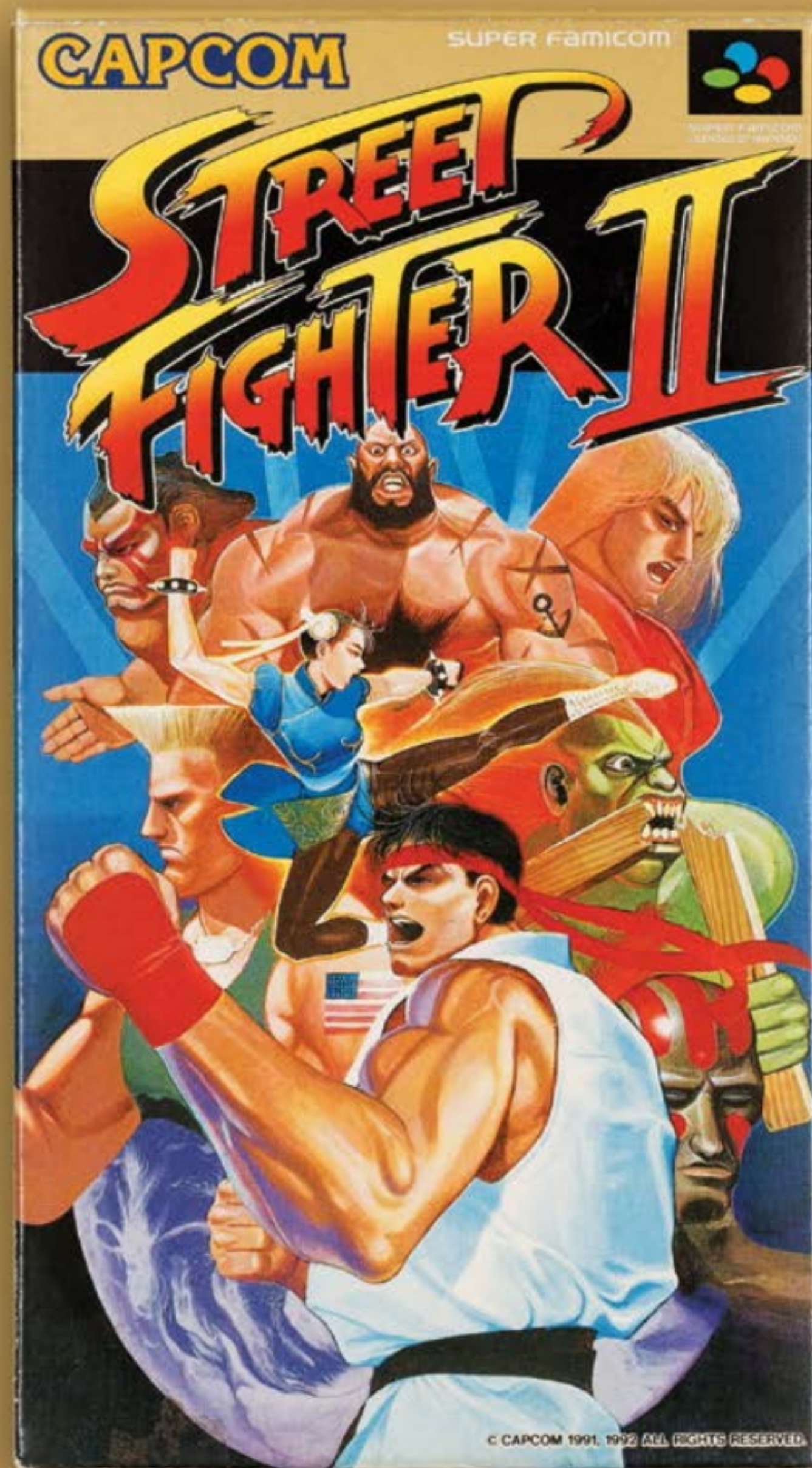
STEALTH

ステルス
AXES ART AMUSE / HECTOR (1992)
GENRE: STRATEGY

Set during the Vietnam conflict, Stealth places the player in control of a platoon of US Army soldiers as they attempt to pacify the Viet Cong forces. The turn-based combat might seem familiar enough: troops can fire, move, wait or – in the case of radio operators – call in air strikes or artillery. But Stealth offers a unique and historically accurate take on enemy units; the Viet Cong only really become visible during their turn, and quickly dissolve into the jungle after taking a shot at your soldiers. They also dress in the same garb as the civilian population – something that is historically authentic.

Stealth's cover shows a painting of American troops preparing for battle. In the foreground a Huey helicopter is taking an injured soldier on board, while an F-4 Phantom fighter jet streaks overhead. The illustration is no doubt based on real photographs from the conflict.





STREET FIGHTER II: THE WORLD WARRIOR

ストリートファイターII
CAPCOM (1992)
GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

An international fighting tournament is held to decide once and for all who is the mightiest warrior on the face of the planet, and predictably attracts entrants from all over the globe. Ryu, Ken and the monstrous Sagat return from the original 1987 Street Fighter, and are joined by an eclectic cast of pugilists, many of whom – like the green-skinned, electrically-charged Blanka and fire-breathing Dhalsim – possess other-worldly powers. One of the most famous video games of all time, Street Fighter II was a hit in arcades and at home, and the Super Famicom received the first port in 1992, giving it a massive advantage in the battle against Sega's Mega Drive. It was also the first game to be released on a 16-megabit cartridge, and would go on to sell 6.3 million copies across the Super Famicom and SNES.

Crafted by Akira 'Akiman' Yasuda, Street Fighter II's cover is taken from the arcade flyer and features Ryu – arguably the franchise's most famous combatant – standing in the foreground as his fellow world warriors pose around him. Eight selectable characters were available in Street Fighter II, plus four 'Grand Masters' who would only become playable in the sequel, Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting.

STREET FIGHTER II TURBO: HYPER FIGHTING

ストリートファイターII ターボ
CAPCOM (1993)
GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

Released in arcades less than a year after the original Street Fighter II: The World Warrior, Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting was intended to combat the various unofficial coin-op 'hacks' which had appeared shortly after release. Players can finally select the four 'Grand Masters' – Vega, M. Bison, Sagat and Balrog – and it's possible to pit the same characters against themselves. The returning cast are blessed with additional moves, and the gameplay speed has been increased considerably. The Super Famicom port also includes the previous 'Champion Edition' release.

Beautifully illustrated by Kinu Nishimura, the cover for Street Fighter II Turbo shows a selection of world warriors in various poses; Ken is in the centre of the picture, unleashing his new and improved Dragon Punch, while Chun Li charges up her fireball move, another new addition for this release.





STREET FIGHTER ZERO 2

ストリートファイターZERO2
CAPCOM / NINTENDO (1996)
GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

Set between the events of Street Fighter (1987) and Street Fighter II (1991), the Street Fighter Zero sub-series boasts a more cartoon-like graphical style but retains the advancements introduced in Super Street Fighter II Turbo – most notably the special 'Super Moves', which can inflict massive damage when used at the right moment. New characters include SFII favourites Zangief and Dhalsim, who are joined by the likes of Gen (Street Fighter), Rolento (Final Fight) and Sakura, an all-new character who idolises Ryu and copies his move set. An incredible technical accomplishment, the Super Famicom port of Zero 2 makes use of the S-DD1 chip for on-the-fly graphical decompression. Confusingly, the Street Fighter Zero games were known as Street Fighter Alpha in North America and Europe – and just to make matters worse, Capcom released an updated coin-op called Street Fighter Zero 2 Alpha.

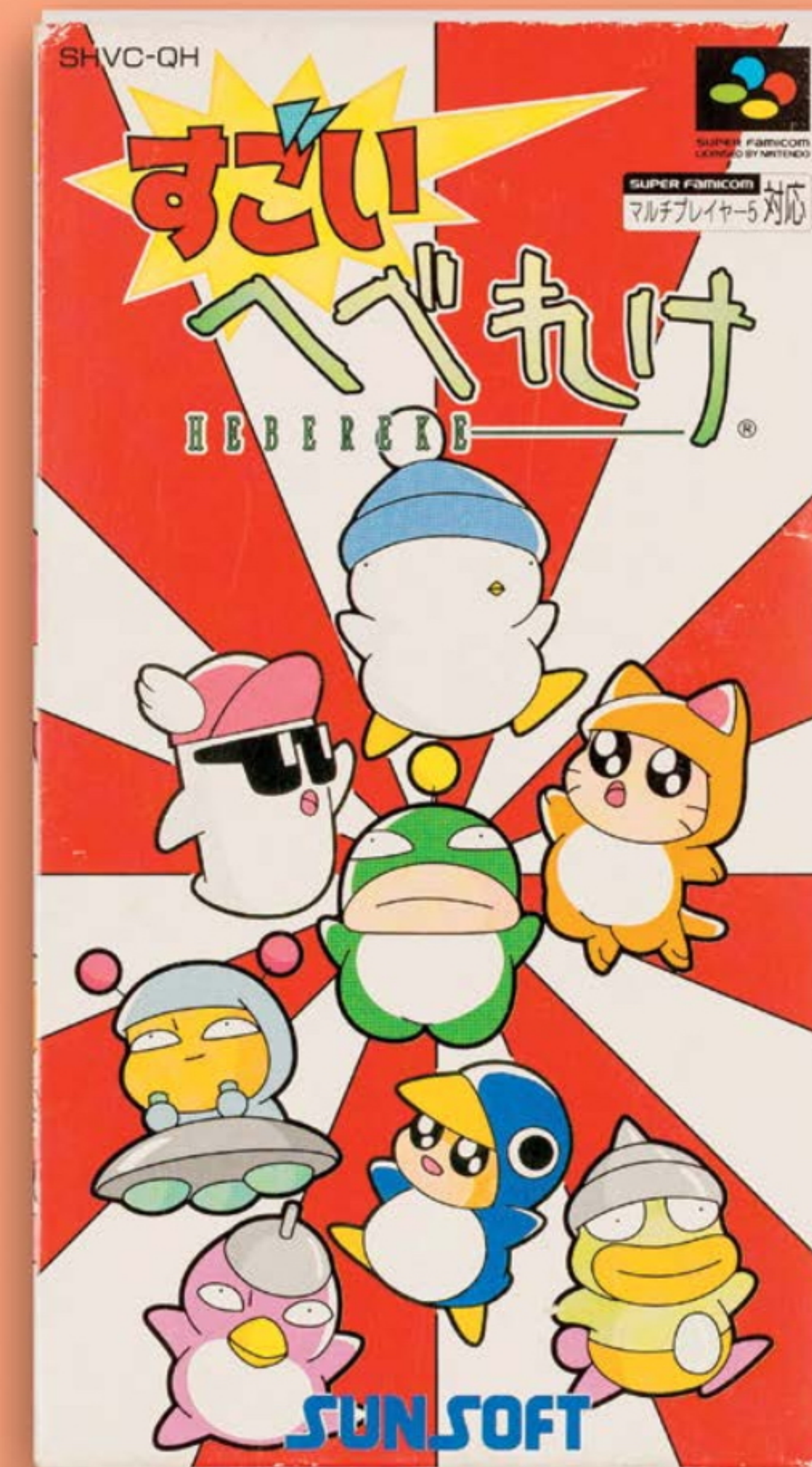
Street Fighter Zero 2 features the same artwork as the arcade flyer, beautifully painted in oils by Capcom artist Dai-Chan. The demonic Gōki – or Akuma as he's known in the West – towers over a youthful-looking Ryu (despite being the same size in the game). Eyes aflame and razor-sharp teeth bared, Gōki is the personification of pure evil, and his defeat is Ryu's ultimate objective.

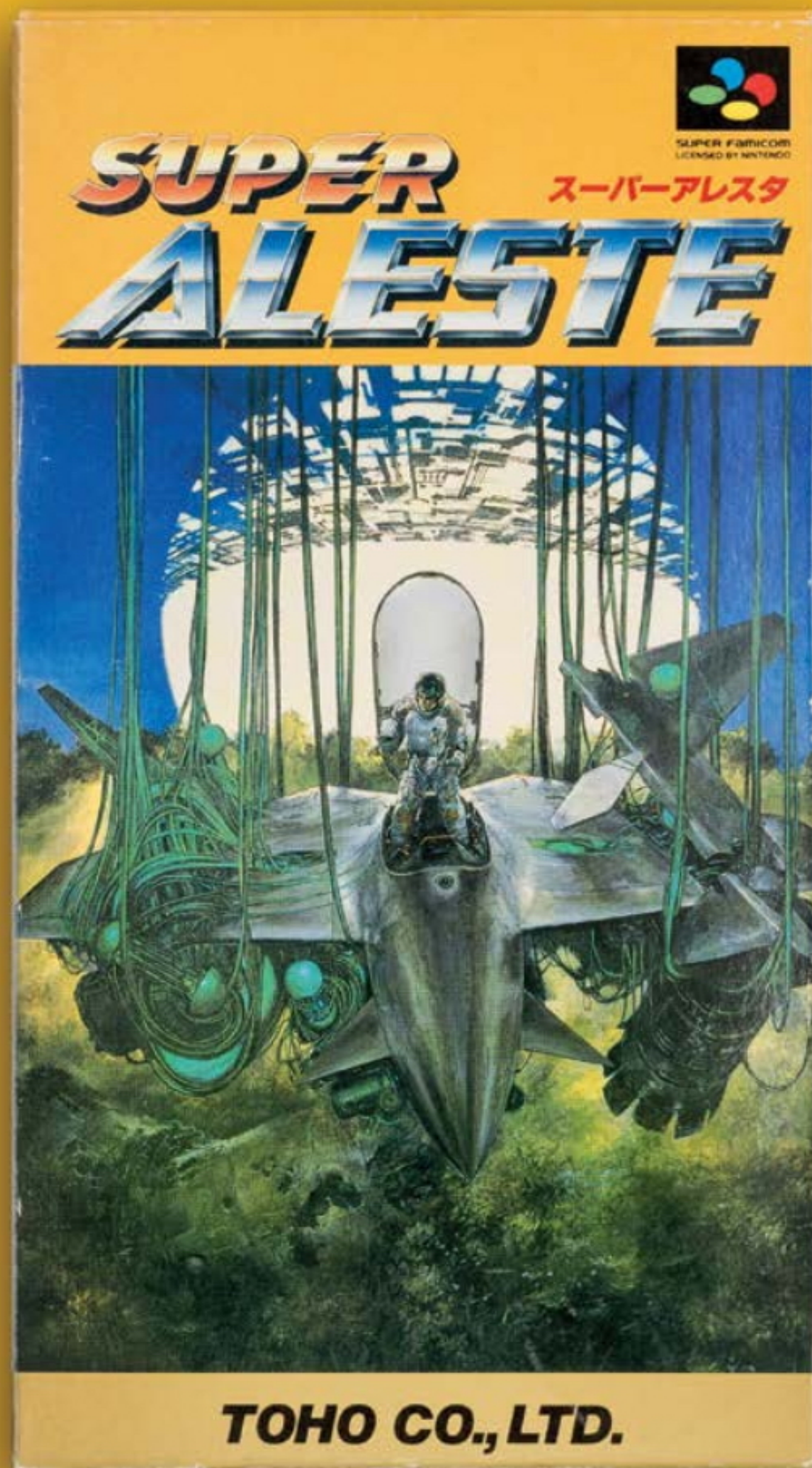
SUGOI HEBEREKE

すごいへべれけ
SUNSOFT (1994)
GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

A spin-off title from the Hebereke series which started life on the 8-bit Famicom, Sugoi Hebereke is a top-down fighting game which pre-dates the kind of chaotic action the Smash Bros. franchise would popularise on the Nintendo 64. Using the Super Famicom Multitap, up to four players can engage in comic combat action, with lead character Hebe – who would become Sunsoft's mascot for a short period of time – and an assortment of other cute protagonists attempting to knock one another out in a series of hazard-filled arenas.

The cover of Sugoi Hebereke features a number of characters designed by the series' creator, Ryōji 'Uchii' Uchimichi. However the cute, cuddly and seemingly harmless creatures offer no indication of the pugilistic mayhem concealed within. A long time game artist, Uchimichi worked on titles such as Xenogears, Chrono Cross and Dawn of Mana as well as the Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest series.





SUPER ALESTE

スーパーアレスタ

COMPILE / TOHO (1992)

GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

In 2048, a mysterious sphere falls to Earth from space and lays waste to cities all over the globe, before heading to the Amazon where it begins to draw energy from the jungle and expand in size, forming a massive impenetrable city. Able to effortlessly repel any offensive move made by the puzzled Earth military – including attacks by the proven Aleste fighter – the sphere seems undefeatable. However, a young alien woman named Thi – newly-freed after being imprisoned aboard the sphere – teams up with the ace pilot Raz and the pair take to the skies in the vastly improved Super Aleste craft. Thi is capable of destroying the sphere from within, and must travel with Raz deep into the structure to bring about its final destruction, thus saving humanity.

Super Aleste's surprisingly melancholic cover image shows the titular fighter craft in a damaged state and seemingly suspended by vines above the jungle. Created by Naoyuki Kato, the art has a haunting quality, which is curiously at odds with the intense action featured in the game. The game was released in the West as Space Megaforce, with a more traditional, and far less engaging, sci-fi cover.

SUPER BACK TO THE FUTURE PART II

スーパー・バック・トゥ・ザ・フューチャーII

DAFT / INVICTUS / TOSHIBA EMI (1993)

GENRE: PLATFORM

A cute, super-deformed take on the classic Hollywood sequel, Super Back to the Future II loosely follows the film's time-travelling storyline. Marty has to journey to the future to solve problems with offspring he didn't even know he had, but while there he gets his hands on a hoverboard and creates an alternative future by unwittingly placing a sports almanac in the hands of antagonist Biff. The aging Biff steals the iconic DeLorean time machine and uses it to return to 1955, where he gives the almanac to his younger self, who makes his fortune by betting on major sporting events. Marty – along with his friend, the wild-eyed scientist Doc Brown – must unravel this testing conundrum across a series of platforming levels based on events in the film. Even though it featured a big-budget movie license, the game was never released outside of Japan.

Despite the proliferation of appealing super-deformed artwork featured in the game, the cover is simply a replication of the movie poster, showing Marty and Doc Brown stepping out of the DeLorean, now freshly equipped with flying capability. Below this is a sequence of images taken from the game, showing the adorable Marty sprite performing tricks on his hoverboard.





SUPER BOMBERMAN

スーパーボンバーマン
HUDSON SOFT (1993)
GENRE: ACTION / STRATEGY

Hudson Soft's hugely successful franchise made its debut on the Super Famicom with Super Bomberman – the first of what would become a series of five Super Famicom releases and two competition editions. You can choose from three modes: Normal Mode consisting of six themed worlds to beat, each containing eight stages; Battle Mode, a one-to-four player match with 12 stages to choose from; and Story Mode, which involves White Bomberman having to defeat the game's boss, Carat Diamond, and his hordes of robot Bomberman.

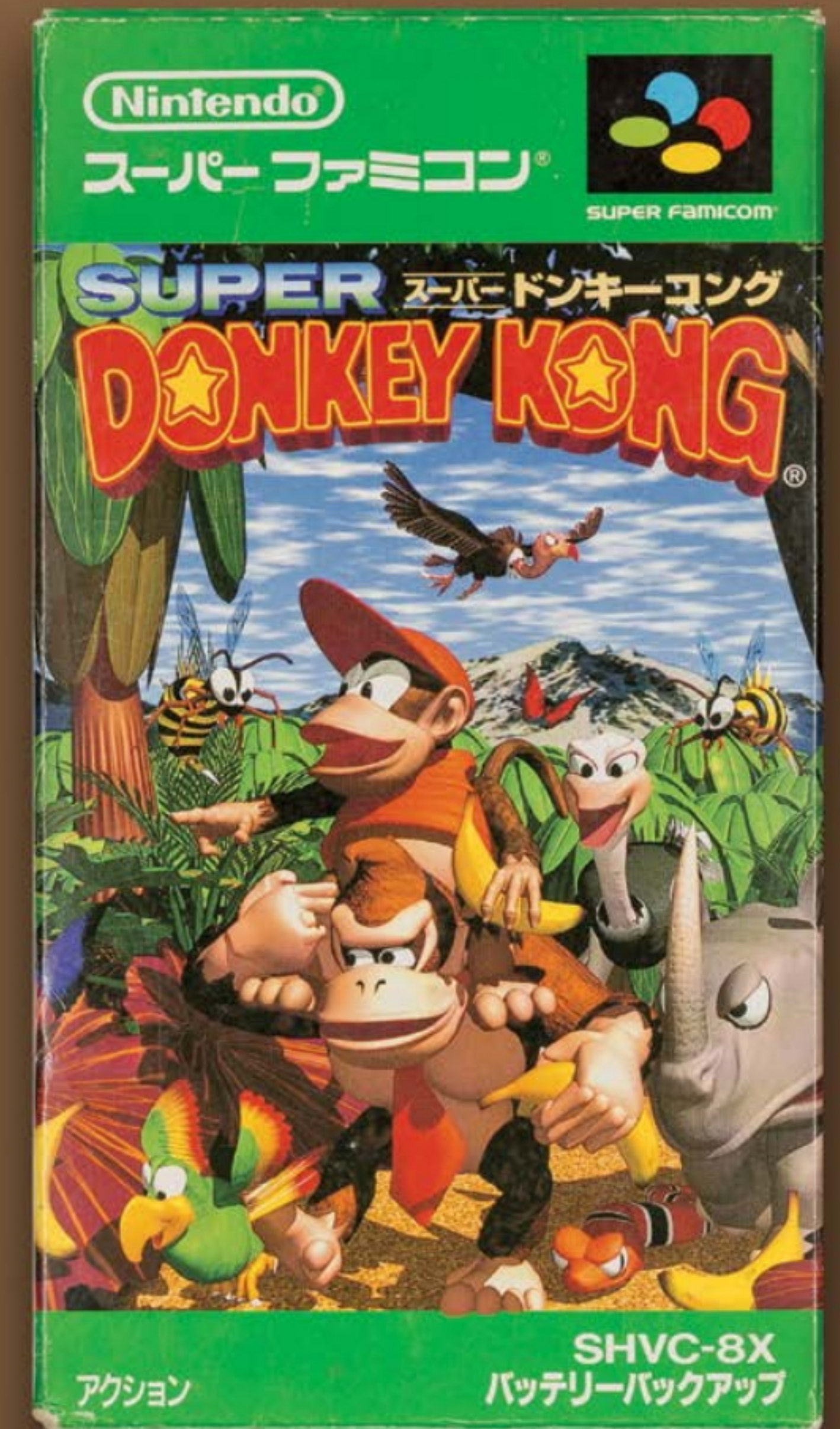
With its thick comic book-style line art and bright and bold colouring, Super Bomberman's packaging is bursting with character and style. Each Bomberman is displayed with our main hero, White Bomberman, situated in the centre amidst an explosion filled with items and characters from the game. The illustration fills the box perfectly, and despite the intricacies of the artwork, its composition leads our eye from the top of the box to the bottom, revealing the iconic Japanese Bomberman logo. It's Japanese kawaii-personified and perfectly depicts the frantic action and originality this game has to offer.

SUPER DONKEY KONG

スーパードンキーコング
RARE / NINTENDO (1994)
GENRE: PLATFORM

British developer, Rare, brought one of Nintendo's oldest and cherished franchises to the Super Famicom with Donkey Kong Country, or the Super Donkey Kong series, as it was known in Japan. In this action platform game, Donkey Kong and his nephew, Diddy are tasked with recovering their stolen hoard of bananas from the evil King K. Rool and his Kremlings by exploring Donkey Kong Island. Donkey Kong Country was the first Nintendo game to feature pre-rendered 3D graphics, a process made possible by using Silicon Graphics workstations. Rare developed this technique further by increasing the level of additional detail and frames of animation, which they referred to as 'ACM' (Advanced Computer Modelling). Donkey Kong Country is the first Donkey Kong game that was not produced or directed by the character's original creator, Shigeru Miyamoto.

Donkey Kong Country's cover is something of a milestone for Nintendo's choice of promotional design. Its 3D rendered cover heralded the beginning of a new trend of video game design, which was already emerging on other consoles, including the Saturn, 3DO and PlayStation. Traditional illustrations and commissioned paintings would soon be replaced by (what would be considered today as) crude polygonal rendered images.





SUPER DONKEY KONG 2: DIXIE & DIDDY

スーパードンキーコング2
ディクシー & ディディー
RARE / NINTENDO (1995)
GENRE: PLATFORM

In this instalment of the Donkey Kong Country franchise, Kong has been kidnapped by pirate, Captain K. Rool, the Kremling king who stole the banana hoard in the first game and is now demanding it as a ransom. Diddy Kong is tasked with rescuing Donkey Kong from the Kaptain, and joining him in his quest is his girlfriend and new series entrant, Dixie Kong. Together, they travel through Crocodile Isle and are helped en route by their animal buddies.

Donkey Kong Country 2's cover features a more detailed and colourful 3D rendered model of each of the game's main characters. Its cutesy, toy-like aesthetic works well for the demographic that Nintendo was marketing this game to, and despite being designed over two decades ago, Donkey Kong's visual style continues to this day, with Nintendo adopting it across several major franchises, including Super Mario.

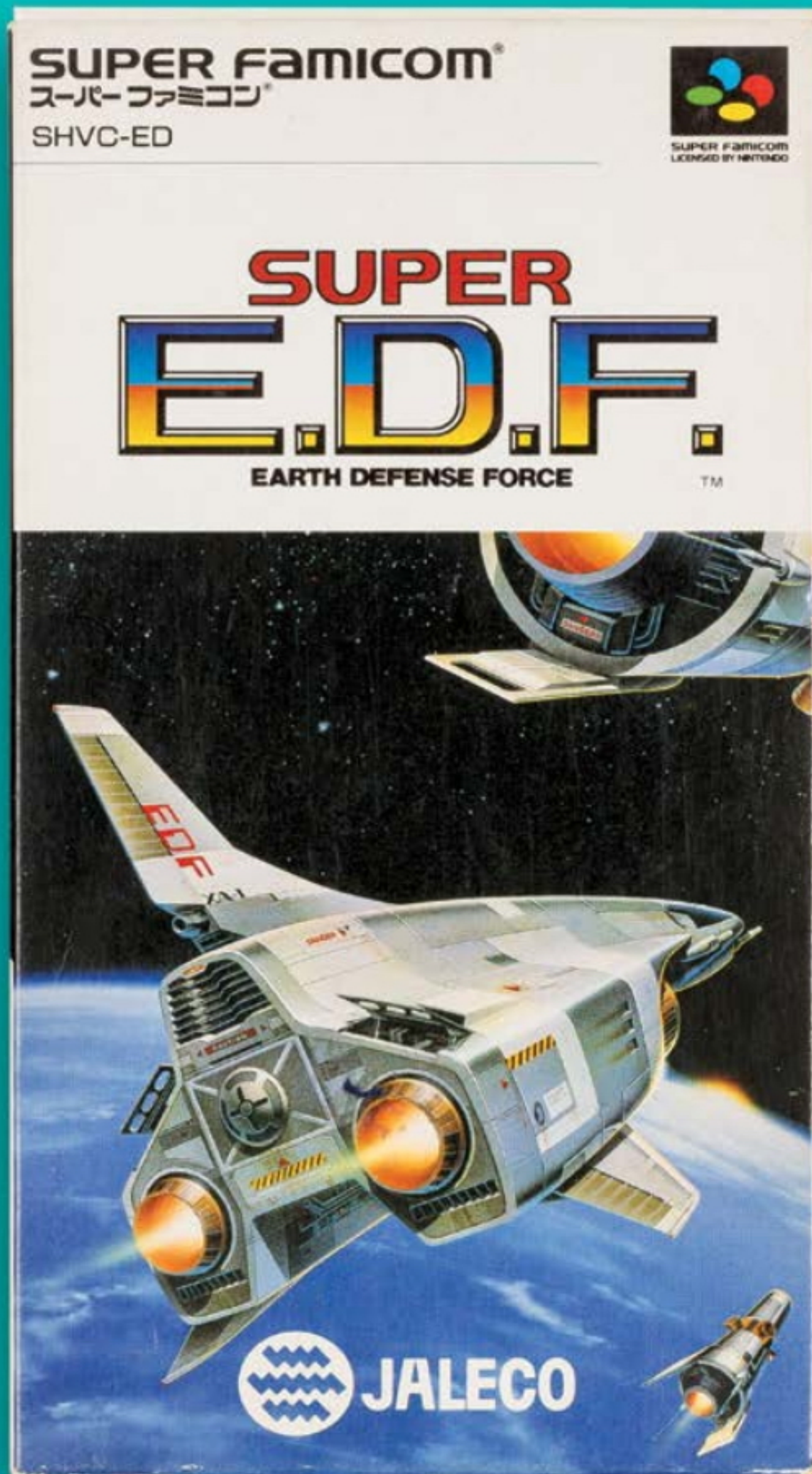
SUPER DONKEY KONG 3: NAZO NO KUREMISU TŌ

スーパードンキーコング3
謎のクレミス島
RARE / NINTENDO (1996)
GENRE: PLATFORM

Donkey Kong and Diddy Kong have disappeared somewhere in the Northern Kremisphere, and it's left to Dixie Kong to find them. Joined by her cousin Kiddy Kong, and aided by Funky Kong's vehicles which are used to reach new areas of the game, they must reach Kastle KAOS, and come face-to-face with their arch nemesis, Baron K. Roolenstein, the latest moniker of King K. Rool.

The artwork for Super Donkey Kong 3 was originally designed for the Super Nintendo's landscape format, and as such the Western box art contains more scenery and characters. For the portrait Japanese format, the artwork was flipped horizontally, resulting in the characters moving in the opposite direction. More of the original artwork's sky is revealed, providing the box with ample space for logo positioning and keeping the three Japanese releases consistent in style. This third and final instalment of the trilogy was met with mixed critical reception, but still proved a commercial success with over 1.7 million sales in Japan alone.





SUPER E.D.F.

スーパーアースディフェンスフォース
JALECO (1991)
GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

Based on Jaleco's Earth Defense Force arcade game, Super E.D.F. is a horizontally-scrolling shooter which boasts the traditional 'Earth against aliens' storyline present in so many other examples of the genre. Like the plot, the gameplay follows a tried and tested pattern, with each level ending in a boss battle, but Super E.D.F. does have some tricks of its own. There's an RPG-style level system which allows you to build the power of your weapons over the course of the game, for example.

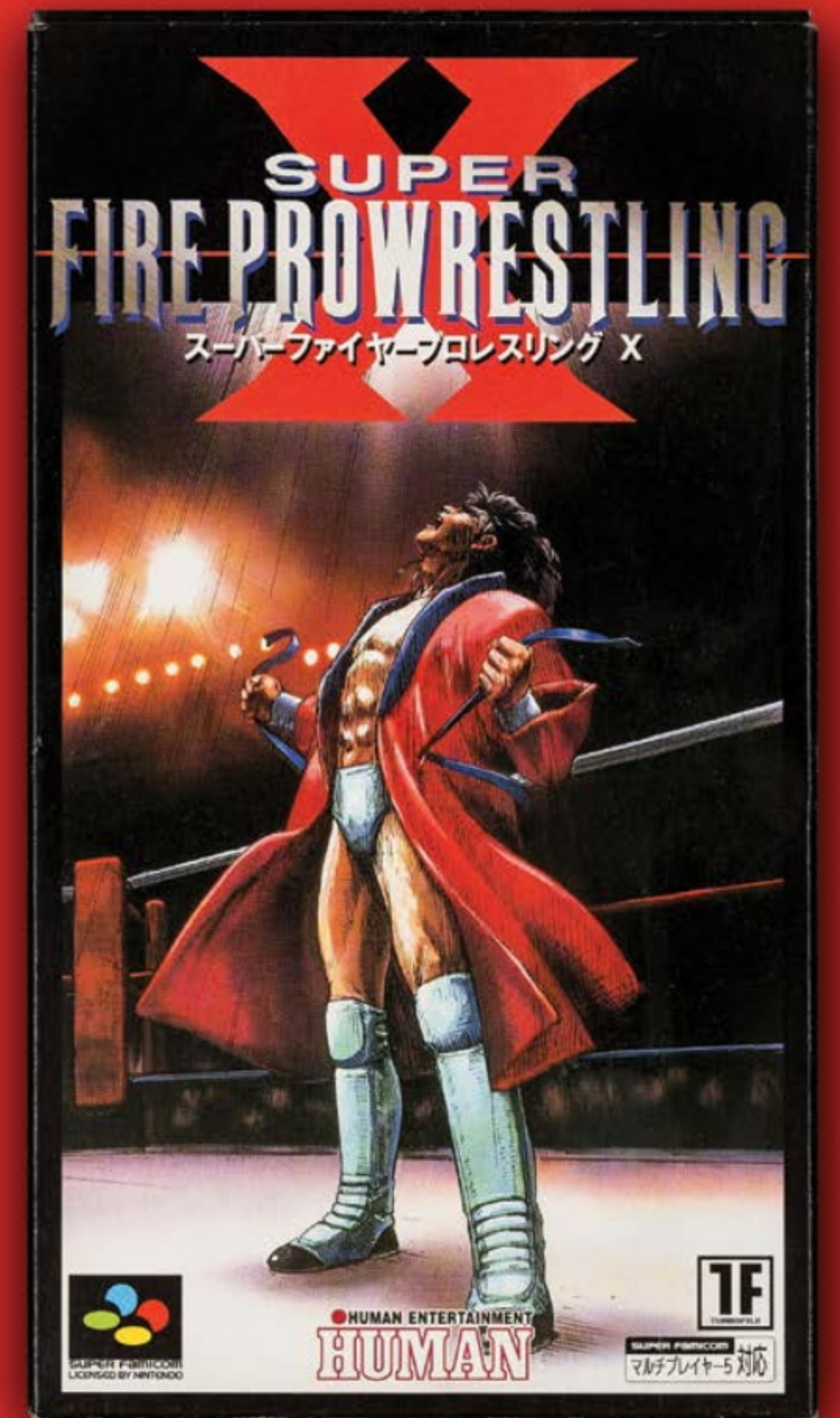
Set against the inky blackness of space, the futuristic craft gracing the cover of Super E.D.F. looks surprisingly serene when you consider the explosive events contained within the game itself. This polished airbrush artwork calls to mind the classic sci-fi imagery of the '70s and '80s

SUPER FIRE PRO WRESTLING X

スーパーファイヤープロレスリングX
HUMAN ENTERTAINMENT (1995)
GENRE: WRESTLING

Human's Fire Pro Wrestling series began life in 1989 and within the space of a few entries became the de facto game of choice for dedicated grappling fans, thanks to its tight gameplay, wide range of authentic moves and faithfulness to the spirit of the sport – despite the fact that it lacked real-life wrestlers. Super Fire Pro Wrestling X finds the series in full swing, earning it a new legion of fans. A year later, Super Fire Pro Wrestling X Premium would drastically improve on the winning formula thanks to the introduction of a create-a-wrestler mode, and the series would continue until the Xbox 360 era. Masato Masuda – the brains behind Fire Pro – sadly passed away in 2014 at the age of 48.

One of the game's many grapplers is depicted on the cover making his entrance to the squared circle, head thrown back as he screams defiance, presumably at his equally enthusiastic opponent. The same image would be used on the cover for Super Fire Pro Wrestling X Premium, albeit as a greyscale image and in landscape format as opposed to portrait.





SUPER GENJIN

超原人

RED / HUDSON SOFT (1994)

GENRE: ACTION/SIDE SCROLLING

Genjin – or Bonk as he’s known in the West – started life as a character in a magazine promoting the PC Engine, and following his growth in popularity became the hero of his own game. This installment was the fourth in the Genjin series, but the first to be released on the Super Famicom. Here Genjin continues his battles with evil King Drool, and has fallen foul of a trap sending him into the future. The game locations are somewhat random, starting in modern-day Japan, and moving through an amusement park, the insides of a dinosaur and even the low gravity of the Moon. The player uses Genjin’s infamously hard head to negotiate paths, overcome obstacles and fend off enemy attacks in order to return to prehistoric times.

Super Genjin’s bright and bustling cover depicts our hero in the various guises he takes on during the game, and follows on from the art style seen in previous instalments. Rather than using traditional illustrations however, the Super Genjin packaging is a photograph of various pieces of artwork combined as a collage, along with tinfoil stars, corrugated cardboard and wood textures. This unusual treatment gives the box art a three-dimensional, papercraft feel.

SUPER GENJIN 2

超原人2

HUDSON SOFT / RED (1995)

GENRE: ACTION/PLATFORMER

Genjin’s adventures continue, though only in Japan as this title was never released overseas. Genjin can transform into a number of forms, including Ballerina, Thief and Drill, and in these guises he can double jump, throw smiley faces and tunnel through rocks. In his angriest form, Genjin can smash his head on the ground producing waves of fire. The varied and colourful levels take us on a bizarre journey, including a graveyard, where Genjin becomes zombified, and across the Wild West featuring alligators wearing crotch-mounted cannons. The bosses are even more imaginative than in its predecessor, making this title one of the whackiest in the series and popular with fans.

Like its precursor, the box design was created by photographing a selection of illustrations. Each drawing has been printed and pasted onto the reverse of corrugated cardboard, giving the design a textured, hand-made look, complete with natural shadows cast from lighting the collage. The use of a subtle, sandy palette makes Super Genjin 2’s box art slightly less effective than its colourful sibling.





SUPER GODZILLA

超ゴジラ
TOHO (1993)
GENRE: STRATEGY

King Ghidorah has returned to destroy Japan in this unusual combination of map-exploration and RPG-style combat. The Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF) deploys its Super X II vehicle to locate Godzilla, and uses a neural implant transmitter device to take control of the beast. We play as the military as they guide Godzilla through various Kaiju attacks across the nation. Godzilla battles with Mechagodzilla, Biollante, King Ghidorah, Mecha-King Ghidorah, Battra and finally Bagan. Sadly, the ambitious design and high quality visuals are let down by the ponderous map scenes and incongruous fighting system.

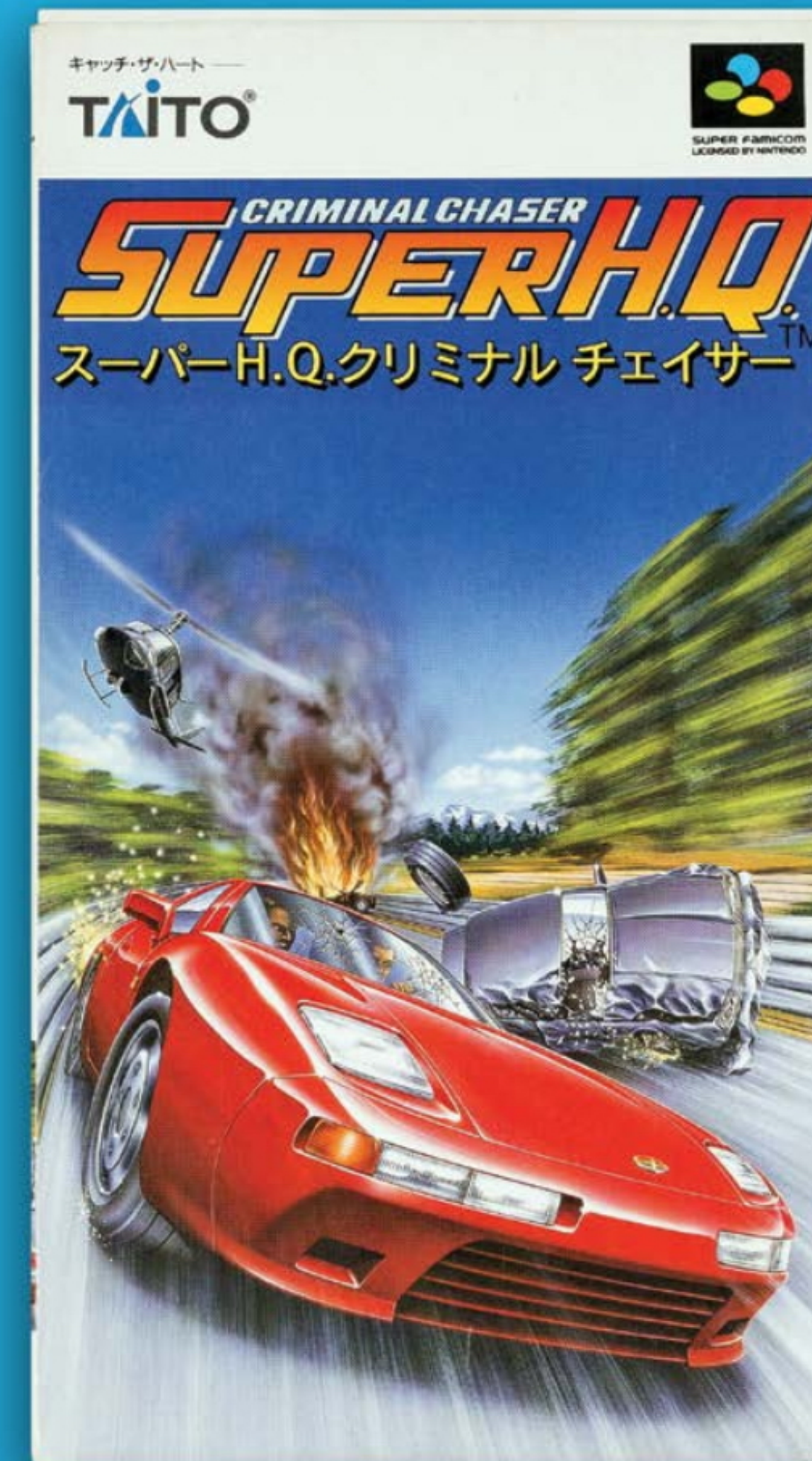
The box art is taken from arguably the most popular Godzilla period amongst fans: the Heisei era (1984-1995), where Godzilla is depicted as a darker and more aggressive character. The classic Japanese Godzilla logo is present, along with a similarly matched typeface for the 'super' prefix. It's another box design that's pure fan-service to any Godzilla devotee.

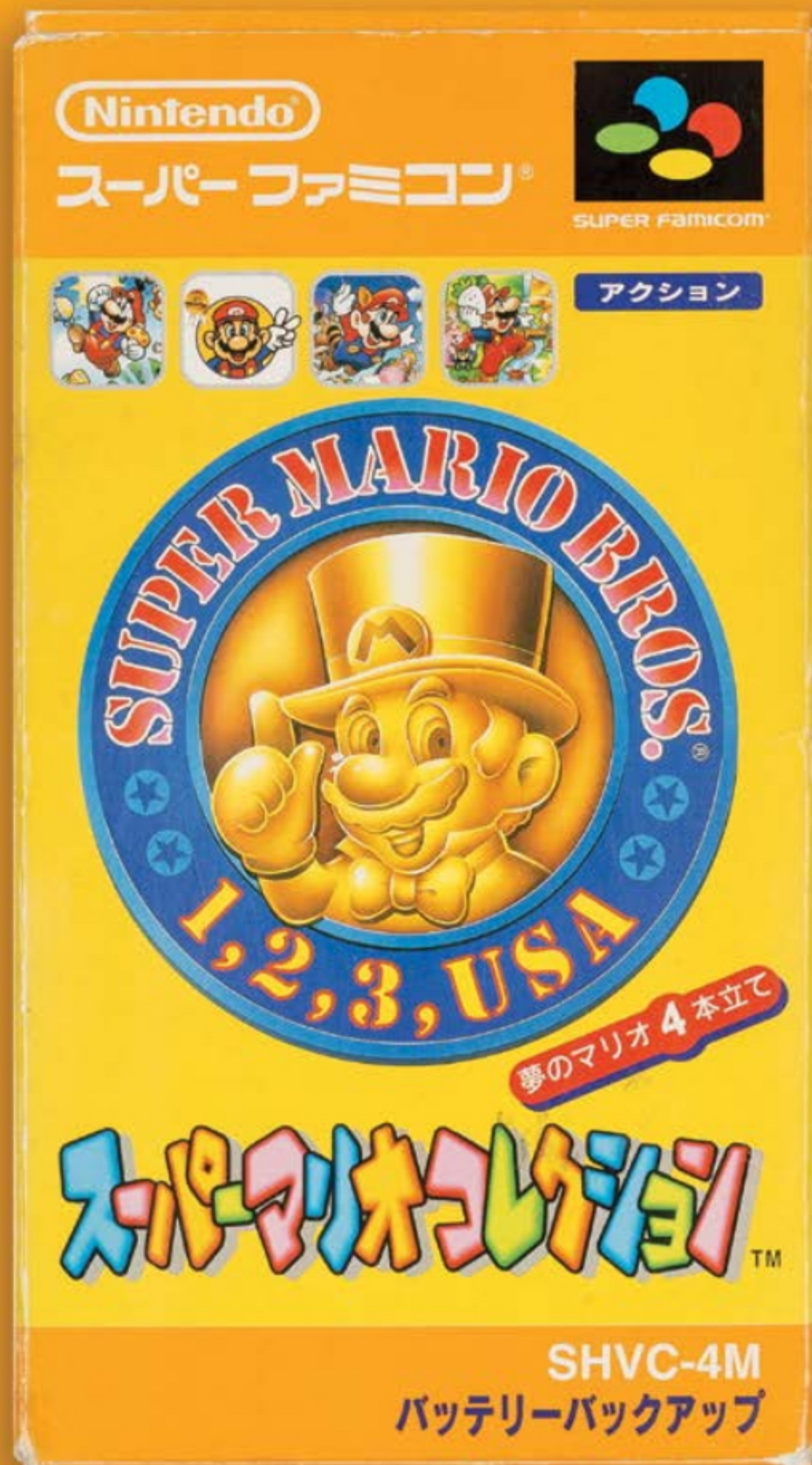
SUPER H.Q. CRIMINAL CHASER

スーパーH.Q. クリミナルチェイサー
TAITO (1993)
GENRE: DRIVING

Known as Super Chase H.Q. elsewhere in the world, Super H.Q. Criminal Chaser differs from other entries in Taito's popular Chase H.Q. series by adopting a first-person perspective. It's based on the 1992 arcade title Super Chase: Criminal Termination, with elements lifted from the 1989 coin-op Special Criminal Investigation. Assuming the role of an undercover police pursuit officer, the objective is to navigate your way through traffic to catch wanted felons, some of whom lean out of their car windows to shoot or hurl projectiles in your direction. Your car – based on the Porsche 928 – comes equipped with three nitro boosts, which can be deployed to deliver devastating shunts. The first-person viewpoint sometimes makes it hard to negotiate other vehicles, but it comes with neat bonus – you can see your character's reactions in the rear-view mirror.

The box art for Super H.Q. Criminal Chaser shows a surprisingly unscathed Porsche 928 clone smashing a car off the road as the police helicopter tracks both vehicles from above, no doubt relaying essential visual information to Nancy back at Chase Headquarters. It's a suitably dynamic image, with clever use of motion blurring and perspective to add a sense of speed and excitement.





SUPER MARIO COLLECTION

スーパーマリオコレクション
NINTENDO (1993)
GENRE: PLATFORM

Otherwise known as Super Mario-All Stars, Super Mario Collection is an anthology of four titles from the golden era of 8-bit Mario gaming. It features enhanced remakes of Super Mario Bros, the original Japanese release of Super Mario Brothers 2, renamed to 'The Lost Levels' in the Western version, Super Mario Brothers 3 and Super Mario USA, an American exclusive. The game was a huge success for Nintendo, with millions of copies sold across the globe. The game was later ported to the Wii console in 2010, entitled 'Super Mario All-Stars 25th Anniversary Edition'. Since its release, the anniversary edition has enjoyed over 2.24 million sales, presenting a new generation of Mario fans with the opportunity to experience the classics.

The packaging confusingly uses two titles: 'Super Mario Bros 1, 2, 3, USA' is placed around the image of Mario, while the game's official title (Super Mario Collection) is pushed underneath against a yellow backdrop. Each of the game's original covers are pictured along the top in little square frames. The box art is slightly underwhelming and a strange design choice by Nintendo, considering how important a release it was at the time. Nevertheless, Super Mario Collection stands as a Nintendo milestone in its own right and its re-release 17 years later on the Wii console is proof of that.

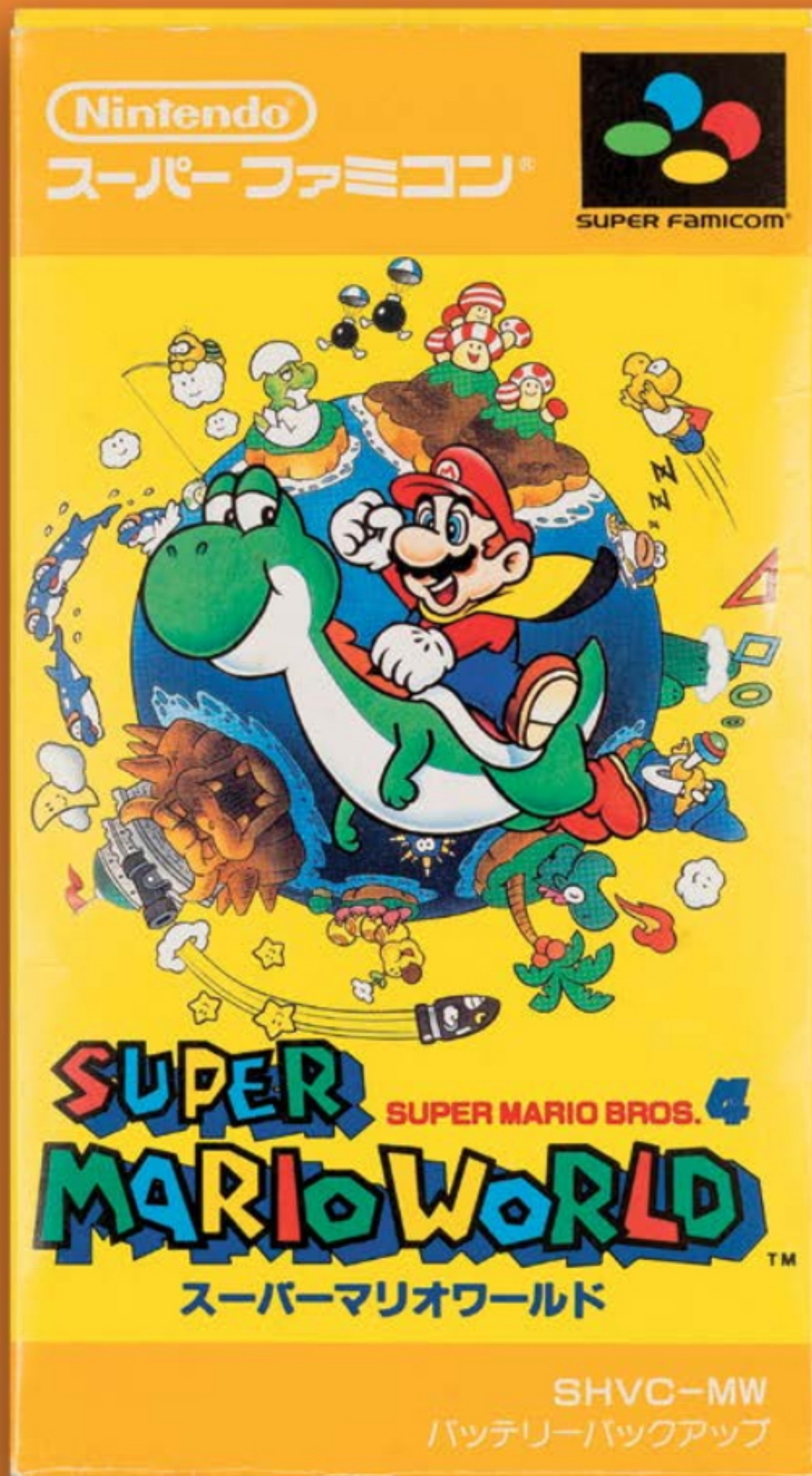
SUPER MARIO RPG

スーパーマリオRPG
SQUARE / NINTENDO (1996)
GENRE: RPG



Mario's task starts in familiar territory as he battles Bowser to rescue Princess Peach. But during the struggle a giant sword falls from the sky and breaks the Star Road – a route along which wishes are granted. Mario and pals must restore the Star Road by travelling through different regions to find and retrieve seven star fragments. Along they way they meet a new enemy, the Smithy Gang, led by a robotic blacksmith from an alternate dimension whose sights are set on world domination. Working alongside their old foe Bowser, Mario and his team must defeat Smithy and his minions, restore order and repair the Star Road – only then can wishes again be granted.

Following on from Donkey Kong Country's rendered 3D graphics, Shigeru Miyamoto and Square created a three-dimensional Mario cast. However, rather than filling the box with detail and colour, the background is white in a similar style to Square's Final Fantasy covers. This clean backdrop provides a focus for the cast of Mario RPG and for fans to marvel at their fabulous new 3D look.



SUPER MARIO WORLD

スーパーマリオワールド
NINTENDO (1990)
GENRE: PLATFORM

Mario and Luigi are recuperating from their hard-won battles by taking a holiday in magical Dinosaur Land. But after waking from a nap on a beach they find Bowser has kidnapped their fellow holidaymaker, Princess Toadstool, and so off they set once more to save the world from Bowser and his clan. This launch title for the Super Famicom proved to be a huge success, selling more than 20 million copies and propelling the Super Mario Bros. into the 16-bit era, aided by Yoshi, a small dinosaur character created for the game.

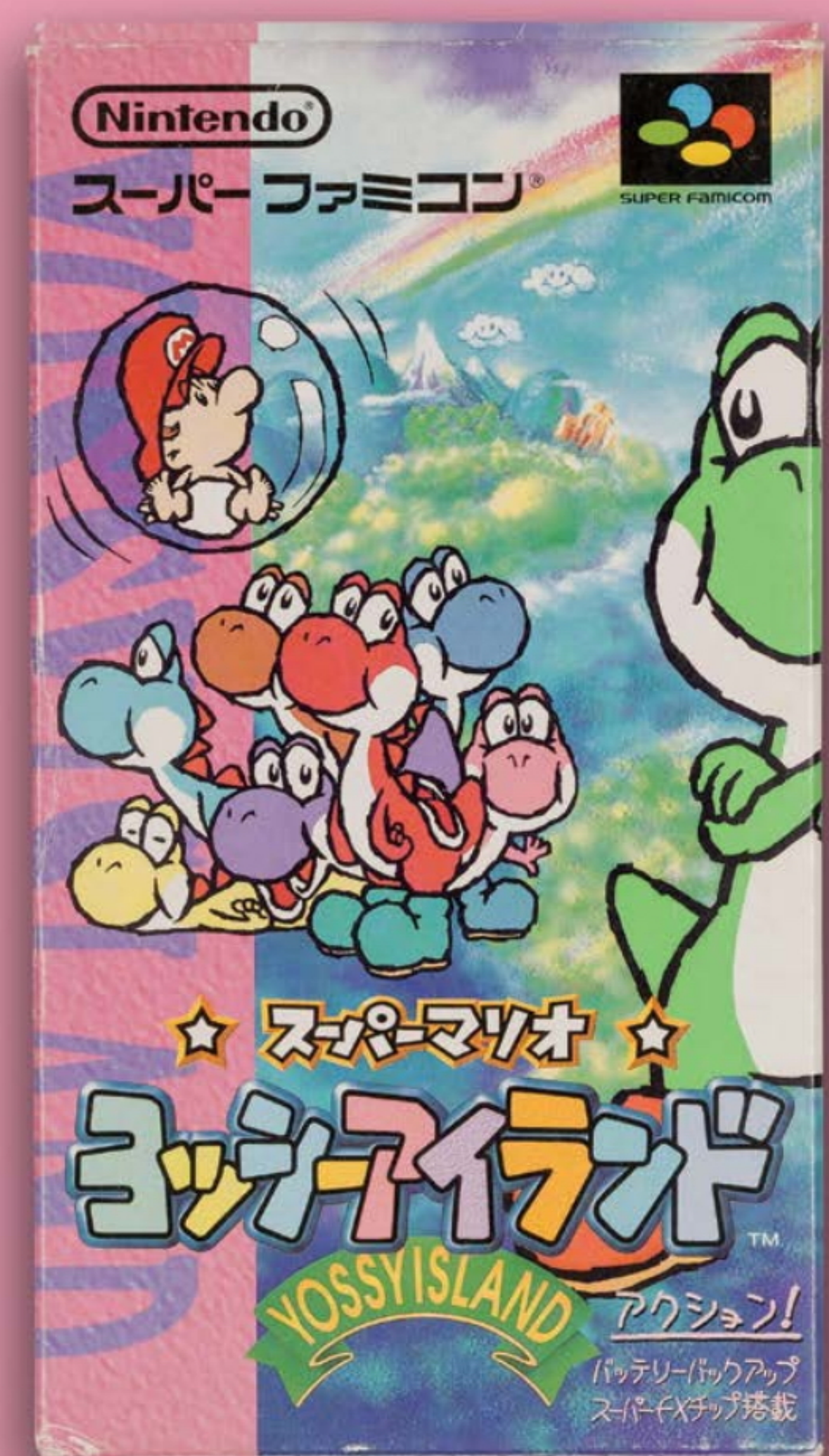
This iconic cover from one of the very best Mario games ever created is entirely hand-drawn, bringing a warmth and personality that only an illustration can provide. Bright oranges and yellows are used to emphasise the game's upbeat charm as a triumphant Mario leaps forward with Yoshi. The little planet full of characters gives a sense of the game's scale, and foreshadows the worlds we'd visit in Super Mario Galaxy.

SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHI'S ISLAND

スーパーマリオ ヨッシーアイランド
NINTENDO (1995)
GENRE: PLATFORM

Despite its numerical suffix, Yoshi's Island (Yossy Island in Romanji) actually acts a prequel to the 1990 Super Famicom launch title. Like its predecessor, it's a 2D side-scrolling platformer but with an unusual hand-drawn aesthetic. We play as Yoshi the dinosaur as he escorts a miniature Baby Mario through 48 levels and across six worlds in order to rescue Luigi, who's been kidnapped by the powerful Magikoopa, Kamek. In development for four years, Yoshi's Island was an instant critical and commercial hit, selling over four million units and being cited as the greatest platform game of all time.

The creative force of Miyamoto steered the development team toward adopting an entirely new visual identity for the game. This rough hand-drawn style is also used for the cover art, with Baby Mario, Yoshi and his brethren looking almost identical to their in-game counterparts. Crayons, watercolour and inks combine to make a charming and visually appealing package.





SUPER MARIO KART

スーパーマリオカート
NINTENDO (1992)
GENRE: RACING

Players engage in madcap go-kart races as one of eight Mario series characters: Mario, Luigi, Peach, Yoshi, Bowser, Donkey Kong Jr, Koopa Troopa and Toad. There are several modes to play, with the challenging five-lap Mario GP; single player Time Trial mode; Vs multiplayer racing; and Battle in which each player aims to keep their three balloons intact from their attackers. Watch out for banana peels, red and yellow Koopa shells, fireballs, eggs and of course poisonous mushrooms. Players of this Japanese version get to savour a post-race tippie, with Bowser glugging beer and Toadstool sipping champagne in their victory animations. These scenes were censored in the U.S. and European versions where the alcohol consumption was removed.

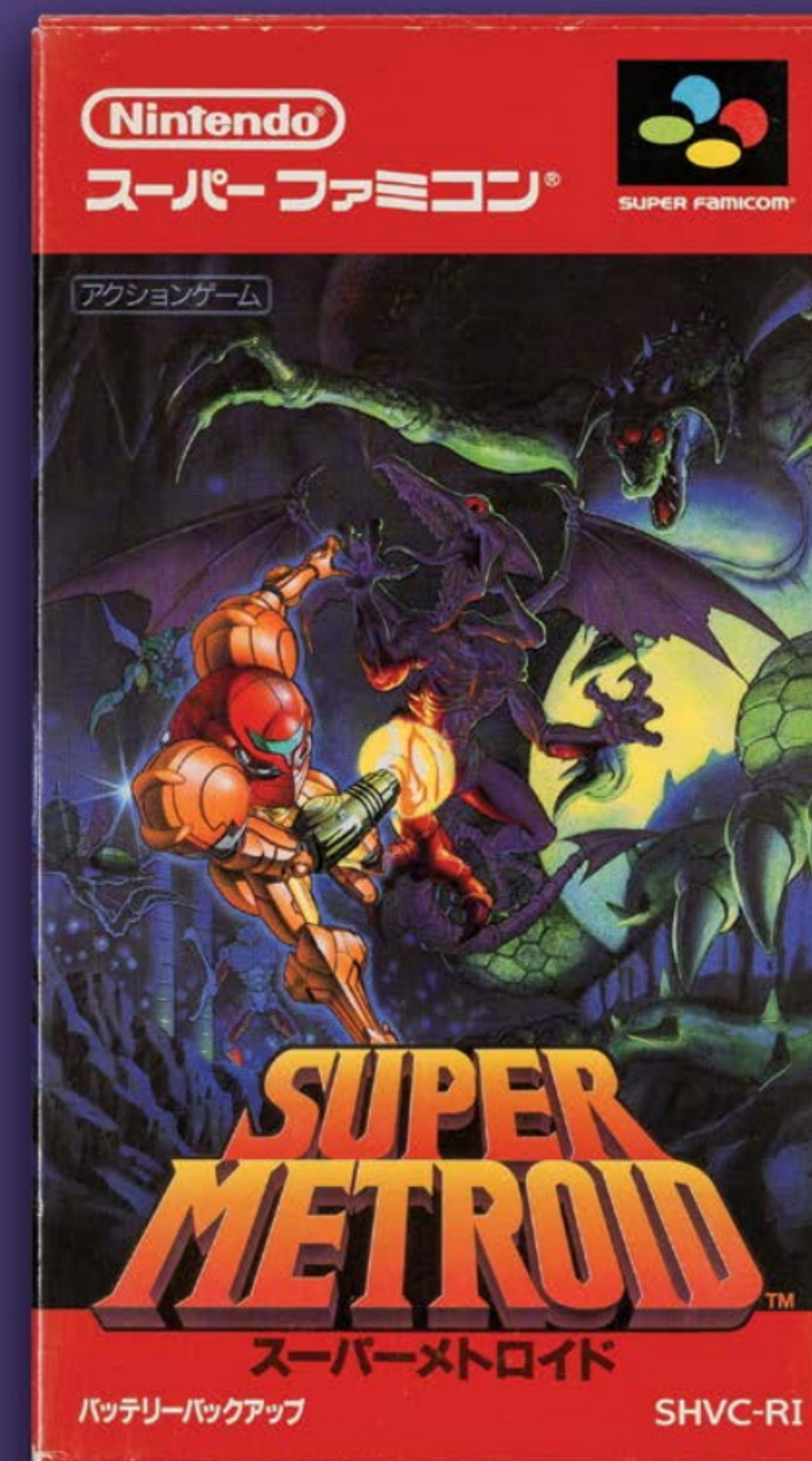
Super Mario Kart's box art channels the retro style of 8-bit era Mario with another hand-drawn illustration of the gang, evoking the classic feel of Famicom cover art. It's an irresistibly cute cover, cleverly layering the design over the red borders, top and bottom, and bringing the action to the fore.

SUPER METROID

スーパーメトロイド
INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS /
NINTENDO (1994)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

The third game in the Metroid series was the largest Super Famicom game at the time of its release. Events continue on from Metroid II: Return of Samus. We learn that bounty hunter Samus Aran has left a Metroid larva, which believes her to be its mother, in the care of scientists trying to harness the powers of this parasitic organism for the good of mankind. Our adventure begins when Samus receives a distress call and learns that the larva has been stolen by Ridley, the leader of the Space Pirates and taken to the planet Zebes. Samus sets out to locate the infant Metroid located at the heart of the newly rebuilt Space Pirate base, and prevent the brigands from gaining use of its powers.

The Japanese release contains the original artwork, which was re-drawn and simplified for Western audiences. In this version, we have Samus and Ridley in all their glory. This detailed and atmospheric design creates a sense of depth by using eerie greens and blues for the alien landscape with Samus' bright orange armour front and centre. The 3D logo leans backwards as if to reveal the action taking place behind it.





SUPER PANG

スーパーパン
MITCHEL CORPORATION /
CAPCOM (1992)
GENRE: ARCADE ACTION

Mitchell Corporation's arcade classic is given the Super Famicom treatment in this excellent port of a game that combines shooting with strategic manoeuvring. The world is under attack from bubbles! Players have to ensure the world is cleared of all bouncing bubbles by spearing them with harpoons, while being careful to avoid any contact – the merest touch costs a life. Bubbles initially split into smaller bubbles, making the task more difficult, but shoot them enough times and eventually they'll disappear. In Tour mode, we play through 99 progressively harder levels set against a variety of world locations, whereas in Panic mode players compete against an endless barrage which tests the player's reflexes to the maximum. Bursting bubbles causes a rainbow meter to fill, which in turn signals when the next level is reached.

Super Pang's cover depicts the game's key features in all its simplistic beauty: bubbles, harpoons and our two playable characters known only as 'red' and 'blue'. It's a simple but neat illustration that fits well with the game's own understated charm.

SUPER R-TYPE

スーパー・アールタイプ
REM (1991)
GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP

Super R-Type contains four of the R-Type II stages and adds three brand new ones. The Bydo Empire has returned and must be defeated by you, a fighter pilot in your super-powered R-9a 'Arrowhead' craft. Notoriously hard, like all of the R-Type games, this also required you to memorise the Bydo enemy attack patterns in order to reach and defeat each end-of-level boss. Although very pretty, the Super Famicom version is plagued by slowdown when things get busy.

Super R-Type's airbrushed cover depicts an end-of-level-boss and is a modified version of the arcade flyer art for R-Type II. Where the original arcade flyer for R-Type was heavily influenced by H.R. Giger's xenomorphic alien design, this diluted depiction of the Bydo Empire removes most of those details and instead opts for a more abstract design. While it's an incongruous representation of the game's biomechanical visuals, it fares better than the Western releases with their gaudy, cartoon-style imagery.





SUPER STAR WARS

スーパー・スター・ウォーズ
SCULPTURED SOFTWARE / LUCASARTS /
JVC (1992)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

The action broadly follows Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope, with cut scenes between levels binding the abbreviated film plot together. You play as Luke with options to control Han Solo or Chewbacca later in the game. It's mainly a platform shooter, but as the story unfolds, you master the lightsaber, take control of an X-Wing and drive a landspeeder, before facing your ultimate challenge – to confront and defeat Darth Vader. Super Star Wars also features audio samples taken directly from the films.

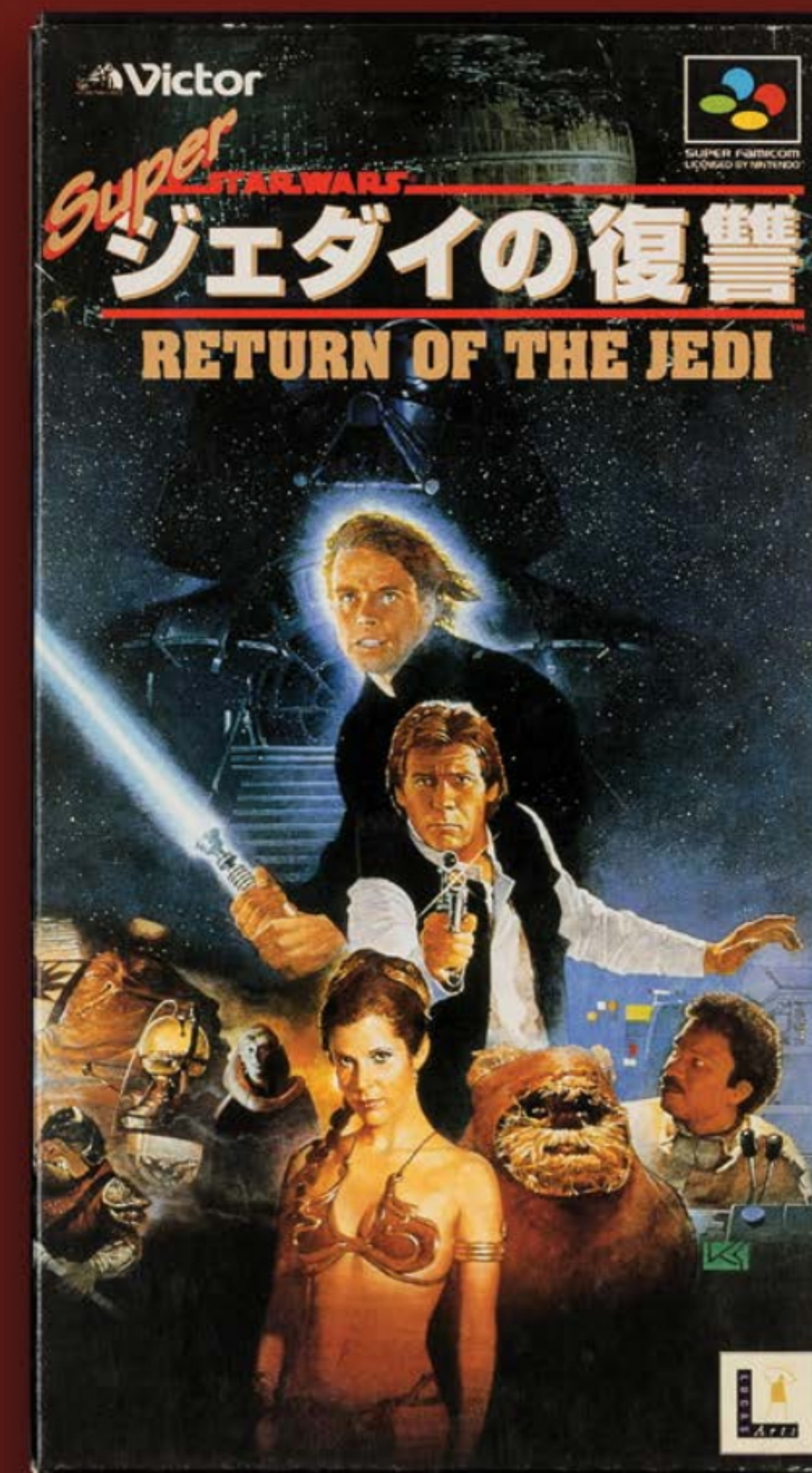
The box art uses the film's original iconic artwork by British artist Tom Chantrell. The painting was commissioned as a quad poster, a four-folded landscape movie poster format, once used in British cinemas. The image also provides an interesting insight into the way Chantrell created his designs, who photographed his wife posing as Princess Leia. This masterpiece of cinematic science fiction art only strengthens the link between the film and this excellent game.

SUPER STAR WARS: RETURN OF THE JEDI

スーパースターウォーズ ジェダイの復讐
SCULPTURED SOFTWARE / LUCASARTS /
JVC (1995)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

For the finale of the Super Star Wars games trilogy, we join the Rebellion in its attempt to crush the Empire once and for all. After rescuing Han Solo from the palace of Jabba the Hutt, the rebels launch an attack on a second, incomplete Death Star, while Luke struggles to make Vader turn from the dark side of the Force. Playable characters include Luke, Han and Chewie, Princess Leia and Wicket the Ewok, and a wide variety of the movie's key scenes are re-created for the game, complete with authentic movie samples.

Another vintage piece of original Star Wars movie art is used for the packaging. Painted by Japanese artist Kazuhiko Sano, this incredibly detailed and atmospheric painting sits beautifully on the portrait dimensions of the Super Famicom's packaging; a mini-movie poster in its own right. The Japanese edition of Return of the Jedi was released in lower numbers, making this game highly sought-after by collectors.





SUPER STAR WARS: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

スーパー・スター・ウォーズ 帝国の逆襲
SCULPTURED SOFTWARE /
LUCASARTS / JVC (1993)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

The second game in the Super Star Wars trilogy is loosely based on the 1980 film of the same name. After the rebels are brutally overpowered by the Empire on their newly established base, Luke Skywalker undertakes Jedi training with Master Yoda, while his comrades are pursued by Darth Vader. The sand dunes of the first game are replaced with the snow covered landscapes of the planet Hoth. Luke, Han and Chewie all feature as playable characters, but this time with the use of primary and secondary weapons.

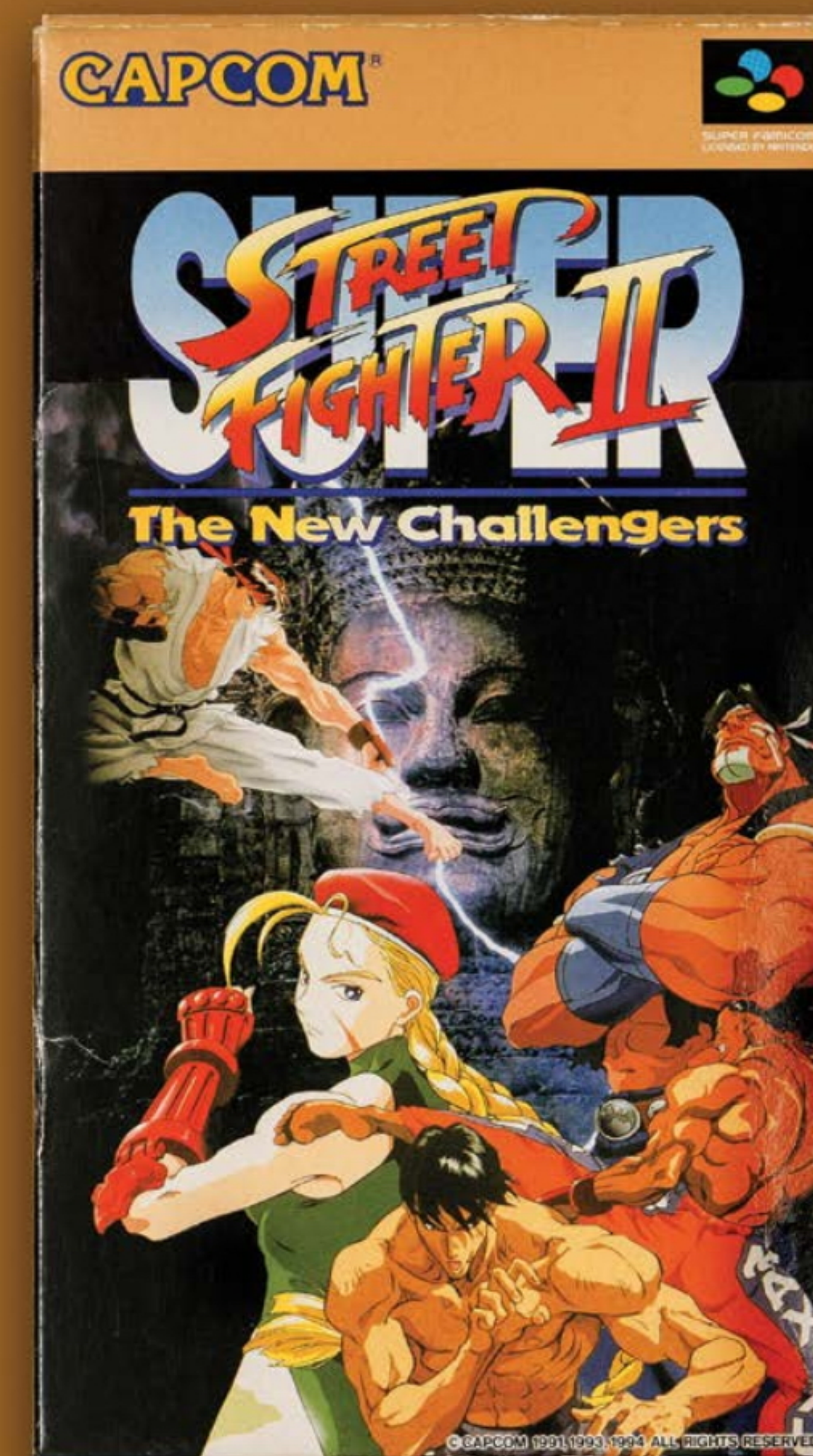
Super Star Wars and the Return of the Jedi both use authentic poster art for their packaging. However, a new illustration was commissioned for the Empire Strikes Back's box, with this illustration by video game artist Greg Winters created specifically for its release. With dodgy likenesses of Luke and Han, the artwork pales in comparison with cinematic versions by the likes of Roger Kastel, Noriyoshi Ohrai and Kazuhiko Sano, but it does at least provide us with a unique piece of Super Famicom Star Wars art.

SUPER STREET FIGHTER II: THE NEW CHALLENGERS

スーパーストリートファイターII:
THE NEW CHALLENGERS
CAPCOM (1994)
GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

The Street Fighter legacy returns with this expanded version of Street Fighter II. Four new characters and stages are added: Cammy, the most popular of the new recruits, whose signature spinning kick sees her whirl through the air in her fetching green thong leotard and red beret; Dee Jay, a Jamaican brawler; Fei-Long, a martial arts expert who sets opponents alight with his rising dragon kick; and Native American giant T. Hawk. Returning fighters meanwhile have learnt new moves and have been given a general graphical makeover.

Sagat's Thailand stage is used as the backdrop to introduce the game's new characters, depicted using an anime visual style. Capcom's box template forces the artwork to be lowered to provide enough space for the logo. This artwork was ditched entirely for the Western release, which instead used the Super Street Fighter II logo bursting through a brick wall, and dropped 'The New Challengers' suffix.



SUPER TETRIS 2 + BOMBLISS: GENTEI BAN

スーパーテトリス2+ボンブリス限定版
BORG / BULLET-PROOF SOFTWARE (1994)
GENRE: PUZZLE



This game is an enhanced Super Famicom version of the original Famicom Tetris 2 + Bombliss. The game has five modes spread across two distinct game types – traditional modes of Tetris, Type A and Type B – but there is a new Type C mode, in which the floor rises upwards as soon as a certain number of pieces have been wiped out. Bombliss has two modes: Contest and Puzzle. You create explosions when you have a complete line containing at least one bomb block, and the more bomb blocks the bigger the explosions. This ‘Gentei Ban’ (limited edition) version was released two years after the original with only slight updates, including new title screen colours, a revised BPS logo and new Bombliss levels. Neither version saw a release outside of Japan.

This limited edition release in black and gold features an embossed logo and gloss print, with great use of typography. Note the new BPS company logo on the top left, and ‘Gentei Ban’ stamp.

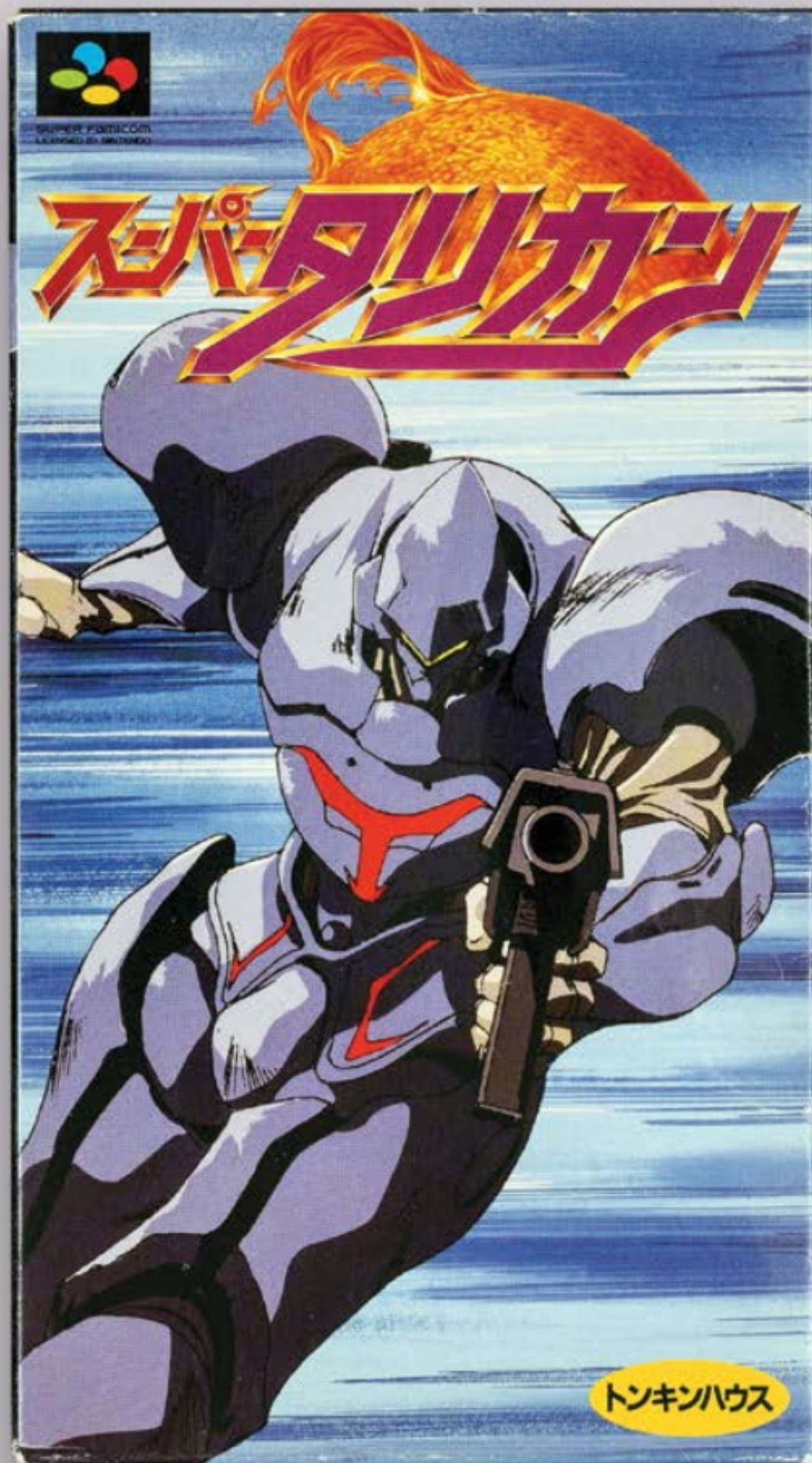
SUPER TETRIS 3

スーパーテトリス3
BORG / BULLET-PROOF SOFTWARE (1994)
GENRE: PUZZLE



Another Japanese-exclusive, Super Tetris 3 features multiple play modes: Standard, Magicaliss, Sparkliss and Famliss. Standard is the Tetris we all know. Sparkliss is similar to Bombliss, but the explosions are on X and Y axes only. Magicaliss features colour variants, with the addition of rainbows and grey blocks; rainbow tetrominos act as ‘wild cards’ by taking on colours around them, and grey blocks can be rotated to change colour. Finally, Famliss is a multiplayer family-themed mode for four players.

This simple but bold design by BPS features a faux-3D effect to frame the work, which provides the box with branding space. While the packaging may lack visual interest, the game itself provides arguably the finest Tetris experience, with Sparkliss mode being one of the best available.



SUPER TURRICAN

スーパータリカン

IACTOR 5 / TONKIN HOUSE (1993)

GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

When the massed troops of 'The Machine' threaten the peaceful planet of Katakis, it's up to the United Planets Freedom Forces to drive them back. You are Bren McGuire, a Freedom Forces soldier whose only weapon against these dark and cruel forces is your state-of-the-art Turrican Assault Suit, giving you the power of an entire army. Use Spread-shots, Freeze-Beams and the Energy Wheel – a destructive Samus-style morph ball – to get rid of enemies over 12 expansive levels, defeating The Machine and freeing Katakis once more.

Manfred Trenz's sci-fi classic is normally associated with artwork more akin to Heavy Metal album covers. However, in this very limited Japanese release, Bren and the Turrican Suit are given a manga makeover, with a Japanese style that bears a close resemblance to the Guyver manga series. A stylish and unique piece of Turrican artwork.

SUPER VALIS AKAKI TSUKI NO OTOME

スーパーヴァリス 赤き月の乙女

LASER SOFT / TENET JAPAN (1992)

GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

This fourth entry in the Valis series sees magical schoolgirl-turned-warrior Yūko Asō become a goddess of the realm Vecanti. Meanwhile a new demonic tyrant has arisen: Gallagher, a former king who escaped his crystal prison at the moment a sinister red moon rose in the sky. Released from his confinement he sets about recruiting old allies and builds a formidable range of foes bound by their ambitions to conquer the world. It is now up to Lena, our new heroine, to defeat Gallagher and his evil recruits. She must do this by utilising her magic skills and mastering the mystical Valis sword given to her by Yūko.

Yūko poses in profile in typical anime-poster style, while Lena's Valis sword dissects the image, creating a space in the lower half of the illustration for the logo. It's a clean and stylish design that looks as if it were taken from an animated series.





SUTTE HAKKUN

ずってはっくん

INDIESZERO / NINTENDO (1999)

GENRE: PUZZLE

This debut puzzle game from developers Indieszero stars Hakkun, a transparent character with a long black beak who can suck in and blow out, absorbing and moving blocks and transporting colour. Hakkun must use his abilities to restore a 'rainbow of happiness' that once covered his world. The rainbow has been shattered and Hakkun is tasked with collecting all the shards located on each level. Sutte Hakkun was originally released in 1997 as a download for Nintendo's Satellaview add-on, and its success led to the game being available via Nintendo Power cart kiosks. Continued popularity among console owners prompted Nintendo to produce a fully packaged version, with box and manual. However it was released late in the life of the console and in low quantities, making it a very rare and often forgotten Super Famicom title.

This cute and colourful illustration depicts the game's elements, with blocks and jars of colour set high above the gameworld map. Hakkun's unique ink-bottle character design is the focal point of the box, with a logo that sits perfectly within the artwork.

SWORD MANIAC

ソード・マニアック

INVICTUS / TOSHIBA EMI (1994)

GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

It's 2097. Civilised society is consigned to the history books and replaced by a nightmarish, near-anarchic world. Zieg Dyne rules Neo New York's underworld of organised crime. In an effort to regain control, Gear, a prisoner serving time for homicide, is chosen to carry out a mission against Zieg Dyne by the U.S. Government. Sword Maniac was released in America as X-Kaliber 2097, and the two versions have a completely different plot, character names and music. While X-Kaliber 2097 boasts a soundtrack arranged by pop techno group Psykosenik, Sword Maniac's original score by Hitoshi Sakimoto and Hayato Matsuo has aged with 16-bit grace.

The artist makes excellent use of the portrait box by positioning our hero, Gear, at the centre, while creating a narrow, vertical background strip to reveal plot elements. A diagonal slash slices the top of the backdrop, a nod to the game's title and Gear's sword-wielding skills.





TAEKWON-DO

テクンドー

HUMAN ENTERTAINMENT (1994)

GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

For this martial arts beat 'em up, you can choose from 19 different characters, each with their own stats and special moves, or create your own character with their own unique capabilities. The game aims to emulate real Taekwondo as much as possible, by using genuine techniques – strikes and kicks are visually crisp, and the accompanying sound effects pack a punch too. As with Taekwondo rules of the time, each match lasts for five rounds, unless you manage to knock your opponent out cold earlier! One of the console's most underrated fighting games.

The cover art borrows from Street Fighter's Ryu, with its character's bandana and dark hair. A clean design is used and the decision to portray the game's many playable characters is sacrificed for a more minimal illustration.

TAKAHASHI MEIJIN NO DAIBŌKEN JIMA

高橋名人の大冒険島

PRODUCE / HUDSON SOFT (1992)

GENRE: PLATFORM

Based on Westone's Wonder Boy series and featuring Hudson Soft executive Takahashi '16-shot' Meijin, this entry in the Adventure Island series expands on the gameplay seen in the original Wonder Boy. Meijin's quest begins when a malevolent wizard transforms his beloved Tina into stone. He immediately resolves to save her by traversing five increasingly difficult stages armed with his trusty stone axe or boomerang. Collecting more units of each weapon enables Meijin to hurl multiple projectiles, and by collecting four of the same weapon his shots become devastating fireballs. The game was released in the West as Super Adventure Island.

The unmistakable artwork of Famitsu illustrator Susumu Matsushita adorns the cover of Takahashi Meijin no Daibōken Jima, with our plucky hero defending the scantily-clad Tina from a horde of beastly monsters. It's a great image, packed with the amusing detail so typical of Matsushita's work.





TAKAHASHI MEIJIN NO DAIBŌKEN JIMA II

高橋名人の大冒険島II

HUDSON SOFT (1995)

GENRE: PLATFORM ADVENTURE

Fresh from rescuing his now-wife Tina in the previous game, Takahashi Meijin takes some time out to enjoy his honeymoon. However the newlyweds become separated, and the player assumes control of Meijin as he wakes to the realisation that he cannot recall his past life or how he arrived on the island. He learns of a kidnapped girl facing a similar predicament, and vows to liberate her as he feels she somehow holds the answer to his amnesia. Unlike the previous Super Famicom adventure, this sequel mixes platforming with light RPG elements; Meijin has to explore a series of islands to locate items that will allow him to access areas initially off-limits. He is also able to equip himself with various weapons and armour in order to make his rescue attempt that little bit easier.

Susumu Matsushita returns for illustration duties on this second Super Famicom release, with his artwork showcasing the changes that have occurred in the core gameplay: Meijin is now clad in a suit of armour and brandishing a mean-looking blade, while the inclusion of the globe behind the logo hints at the multiple locations found in the game. As before, Tina is at Meijin's side, with the love-struck duo surrounded by a host of enemies and monsters.

TALES OF PHANTASIA

テイルズ オブ ファンタジア

WOLF TEAM / NAMCO (1995)

GENRE: RPG



Tales of Phantasia follows the adventures of swordsman Cress Albane and his companions as they travel back and forth through time to defeat an evil sorcerer named Dhaos. The standard RPG battle system of turn-based action set within an isometric plain is replaced with what Wolf Team nicknamed the 'Linear Motion Battle System' (LMBS). Battle scenes take place on a 2D environment and put the player in control of only one character, while supporting characters are set to either defend or fight via an 'automatic' mode. Following its release, Tales of Phantasia became a global success for Namco, with further games released for the PlayStation, Game Boy Advance and iOS. A four-part anime series followed with a supporting manga comic.

Tales of Phantasia's characters and artwork were created by manga illustrator, Kohsuke Fujishima. In this water colour painting, Cress is sat upon his flying horse Pegasus with priestess Mint Adenade behind him and the magic elf Arche Klien riding beside them on her broomstick. The artwork is subtle in direction, but balanced perfectly: Pegasus' curved neck and the flowing cape form an arc across the image, drawing the eye in towards the main characters. However the positioning of the logo weakens the impact of the design slightly.



TATAKAE GENSHIJIN 3 – SHUYAKU WA YAPPARI JOE & MAC

戦え原始人3

主役はやっぱり JOE & MAC

DATA EAST (1994)

GENRE: PLATFORM

The evil caveman Gork has stolen the crown belonging to the Chief of Kali Village, so Joe and Mac take chase across ice-capped mountains, jungles and swamps in their mission to return the crown to its rightful owner. The game is a side-scrolling action-platformer, but there's also an RPG-style overhead map, enabling players to revisit levels to collect additional stone wheels, the in-game currency. Three Joe and Mac games were released for the Super Famicom with different titles used for FAL and North American regions. The original sequel, Joe and Mac 2, was released in America under the name Congo's Caper, so confusingly this third installment is known as Joe and Mac 2: Lost in the Tropics in the U.S. but Joe and Mac 3: Lost in the Tropics in Europe.

This cartoon-style cover has Joe and Mac surrounded by the game's various elements. Wooden spikes, angry Neanderthals and carnivorous dinosaurs frame the artwork, with an ice-capped mountain in the distance, hinting at the later levels in the game. Although the artwork is a little crude, it perfectly encapsulates the game's distinct visual style.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: MUTANT WARRIORS

T.M.N.T. ミュータントウォーリアーズ

KONAMI (1993)

GENRE: BEAT 'EM UP

The Turtles have entered a fighting tournament to both show off their fighting prowess and, more importantly, make sure that Shredder doesn't win. You can enter as any one of the turtles: Leonardo, who leads the turtles and is serious by nature; Donatello, the brains; Raphael, infamous for his wisecracks; and Michelangelo, the party dude. Players face a variety of mutants, aliens and martial artists from the cartoon series as they compete in Tournament, Vs Battle and Story modes. The Western version was known, somewhat prosaically, as Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Tournament Fighters. The character Aska was also altered for the Western release, with additional clothing added to her, in a case of mild censorship undertaken to meet Nintendo of America's approval.

A Kevin Eastman style is adopted for the Japanese cover art, which gives Mutant Warriors a distinct graphic novel feel. Many of the game's enemy protagonists lie in the background with slight blur applied, which focuses the attention on our heroic foursome and makes them stand out.





TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: TURTLES IN TIME

ティーンエージ ミュータント ニンジャ タートルズ / タートルズ イン タイム
KONAMI (1992)
GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

The turtles must restore the Statue of Liberty, which has been stolen by Krang, the supervillain of the TV show, wearing a giant exosuit. Featuring two-player co-op, we get to play as Donatello, Raphael, Leonardo or Michelangelo and must fight our way through the streets of New York, pursuing the Foot Clan's soldiers into the city sewers, along speeding trains and through pirate ships. But before the Statue of Liberty can finally be restored, the Turtles must face Krang and Shredder in a climactic showdown. This Super Famicom release is a port of the 1991 arcade game of the same name.

The Japanese version uses the group logo created for the American 1987 animated TV series, and sees the Turtles re-drawn with a Manhattan backdrop applied to match with the game's plot. The retro look gives this game an authentic feel and will bring back childhood memories for fans of the original cartoon. The cheery illustration is in stark contrast to the Western release, which uses the darker and more aggressive Turtles of the comic.

TETRIS BATTLE GAIDEN

テトリス バトル外伝 武闘外伝
BORG / BULLET-PROOF SOFTWARE (1993)
GENRE: PUZZLE



This story-led version of Tetris borrows from Puyo Puyo with its competitive puzzle-battle theme. There are eight playable characters, all with four different attacks that are activated by collecting magic orbs. Characters include the pumpkin-headed Halloween, a pink bunny named Mirurun, Shaman, Aladdin, Ninja, Wolfman, Princess and Bit. There are an additional two hidden characters, Dragon and Queen, who are only playable by entering a code. And if the game's not tough enough for you, Rensa mode increases gravity and creates a more frenetic pace.

BPS maintains its minimalist style with Tetris cover art and opts for a logo that, somewhat clumsily, combines both English text and hiragana. The pumpkin-headed character Halloween lurks in the corner and can be seen outlined in the background. The Tetris series does at least feature a consistent visual style across all its titles, and their landscape boxes also mark them out from the competition.

TETRIS FLASH

テトリスフラッシュ

ELORG / BULLET-PROOF SOFTWARE (1994)

GENRE: PUZZLE



Tetris Flash was known outside Japan as Tetris 2. It's quite different from the original Tetris game we're familiar with, and plays a lot like Dr. Mario. It also has similarities to elements of Columns and Puyo Puyo making it an interesting take on the Tetris franchise. The aim in Tetris Flash is to match the colours of the blocks that descend from the top of the screen. Each colour has a flashing block and if two or more of the same coloured blocks are matched up with it, all the remaining blocks of the same colour are wiped out.

A beautifully simplistic design is employed on this landscape cover, with a logo that looks as if it's been created from the game's iconic blocks. A subtle blue gradient is used for the background, helping the logo to stand out and represent the franchise without the need of any additional gimmicks (the small fish character relates to the versus mode in which players compete in water tanks with a fish-themed backdrop).

TETSUWAN ATOM

鉄腕アトム

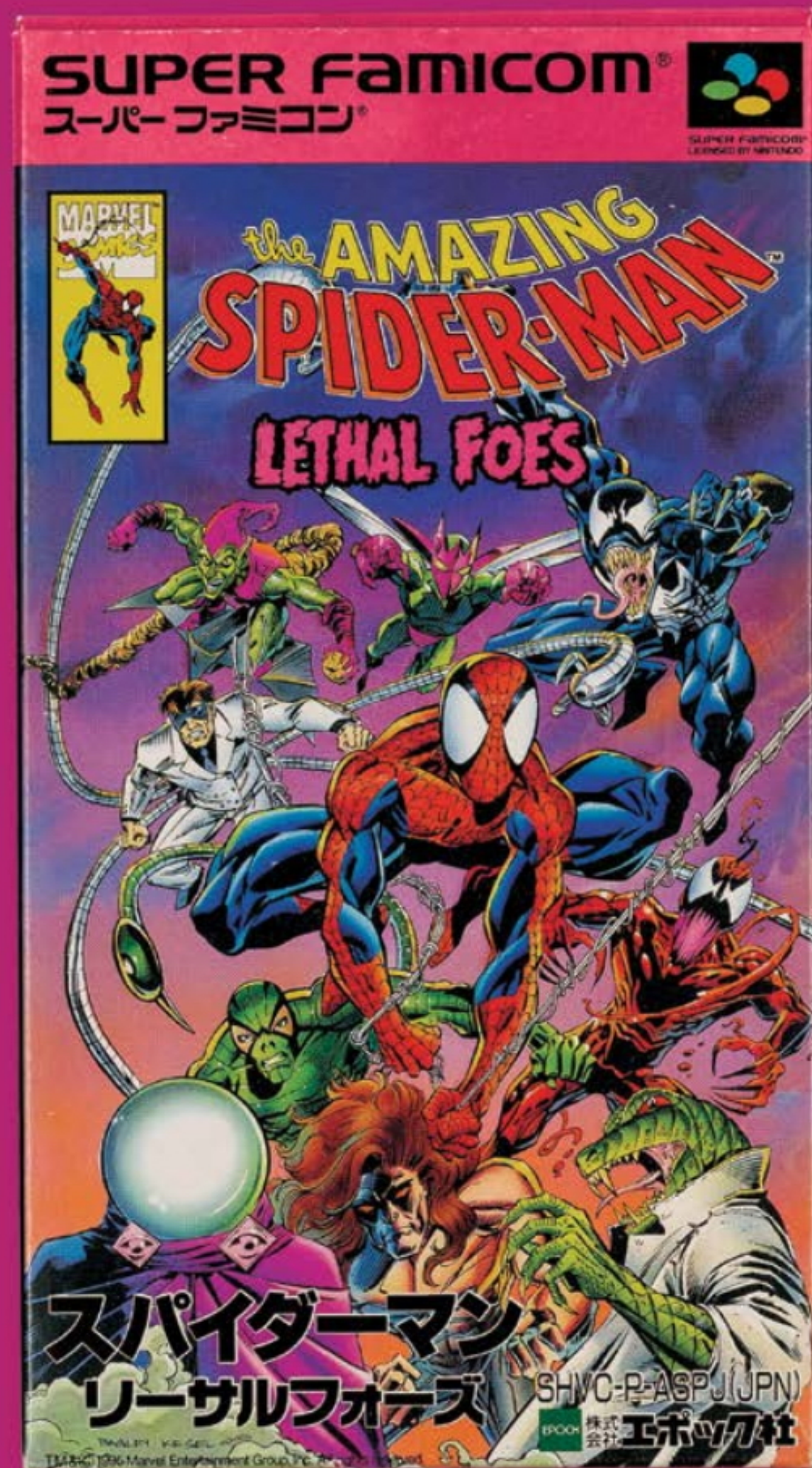
BANPRESTO / ZAMUSE (1994)

GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

Known as Astro Boy in the west, Tetsuwan Atom (Mighty Atom) follows the events of the acclaimed Japanese manga series created by Osamu Tezuka. Set in a future where robots serve their human masters, the game charts the story of a robot child named Atom. Professor Ochanomizu, head of the Ministry of Science, adopts him after discovering the boy in a circus. He soon discovers that Atom has incredible powers and decides to use him to defeat the evil facing humanity. In this scrolling platform game, we play as Atom as he's sent to various locations including a haunted mansion, a space station and the pyramids of Egypt. Atom can attack with his Power Punch, and use his rocket boots for an Air Dash attack and to fly over obstacles.

Atom's iconic character design is displayed in full as he covers the entire box, with some clever use of typography combining both English and hiragana. It's classic Atom Boy manga art, and using a clean white backdrop keeps the illustration looking stylish and modern while maintaining a strong impact. This is a game that was easily recognisable on Japanese store shelves in 1994 and still looks the part.





THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN LETHAL FOES

スパイダーマン リーサルフォース

EPOCH (1994)

GENRE: SCROLLING COMBAT

This Japan-exclusive action game is based on Marvel's 'Lethal Foes of Spider-Man,' comic from 1993. Throughout the game, Spider-Man battles a number of the comic's villains including Venom, Spider-Slayers, Doctor Octopus, Beetle, Lizard, Mysterio, Alistair Smythe, Green Goblin, Carnage and Scorpion. Allied characters who assist Spider-Man include Human Torch, Speedball and Iron Fist. These sequences are revealed via cutscenes throught each level. Additional content can be unlocked by scanning barcodes with the Barcode Battler II Interface.

Lethal Foes is one of the rarest Marvel-licenced Spider-Man video games to exist. Produced in low numbers for a Japanese audience, Lethal Foes contains a plethora of his greatest enemies. This fantastic box art is taken directly from the comic book series and was designed by artists Mark Bagley, Karl Kesel and Paul Mounts. At a glance, it resembles a miniature graphic novel.

THE COMBATRIBES

ザ・コンバットライブス

TECHNOS (1992)

GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

This side-scrolling fighter, originally released in arcade form in 1990, was an exclusive home console port for the Super Famicom and Super Nintendo. A group of vigilantes, known as the 'Combatribes' decide to challenge the local gangs of New York City in an attempt to topple each of the leaders who are wanted by the authorities. Cyborg punk Martha Splatterhead has united the gangs, creating an army of street thugs. Our vigilante heroes – Berserker, Bullova and Blitz – must battle throughout each district and defeat Martha. Unlike the Japanese release, the American Super Nintendo version featured censorship, with the removal of blood on defeated enemies.

The Combatribes is designed in a similar vein to Technos's earlier and genre-defining classics, Renegade and Double Dragon. All three titles share similar elements: an urban American landscape, punks, thugs, weapons and gang bosses. The in-game characters are designed as cartoonish, with squat frames, big heads and short limbs. However, the artwork depicts the characters as tall and more detailed, albeit executed with an amateurish drawing style. All three vigilantes are on display with Berserker positioned in the middle above an embossed metallic slab displaying the title. Despite its relatively naive design, it does fare better than the U.S. box art with its grinning, Spandex-clad American Gladiators-style heroes.



THE FIREMEN

ザ・ファイアーメン
HUMAN ENTERTAINMENT (1994)
GENRE ACTION / ADVENTURE



It's Christmas Eve and fire fighters Pete Grey and Danny McClean are sent to put out a raging fire at the towering Metrotech building. We play as Pete who, armed with his hose and a endless water supply, braves the heat and flames to save trapped the workers – each of whom helps to bolster your life gauge. Radio transmissions from Winona advise you on your mission progress, while Frank Weller, the building's architect, helps to guide you. As you strive to save the day, you need to watch out for rampaging robots, backdrafts and gaping holes that appear as the building starts to collapse.

The game's key characters are combined in a tense montage, depicting their various roles during the perilous job of firefighting. The landscape art works well with Pete's stream of water flying across the box, leading the eye to the logo. Our heroes are captured in intense reds, while the city sits in the cool purples and blues of night. The airbrushed cartoon style is appealing but sits at odds with the game's gritty urban graphics.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TRIFORCE OF THE GODS

ゼルダの伝説 神々のトライフォース
NINTENDO (1991)
GENRE: ACTION ADVENTURE

The third game in The Legend of Zelda series sees a return to the original's overhead view rather than the side-scrolling employed by Zelda II: The Adventure of Link. The evil wizard Agahnim plans to break a seal and release Ganon, King of Thieves, ruler of the Dark World. This dominion was formally the Sacred Realm but Ganon used the Triforce to turn it into a land of darkness. Only by using the power of the Master Sword can Link combat this evil threat, but he must first prove himself worthy of wielding the magic weapon by finding the three pendants of virtue. Link must battle Agahnim, rescue Princess Zelda and fight Ganon in order to restore peace to the land.

Youichi Odabe's artwork reveals a more mature Link with a steely determination in his eye. The series logo returns, but now encased in shining gold. Link's forest-green tunic (his design was apparently inspired by Disney's Peter Pan) is used as the colour scheme for the box itself.





THE NINJA WARRIORS AGAIN

ザ・ニンジャウォーリアーズ アゲイン
NATSUME / TAITO (1994)
GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

When a tyrannical dictator takes over the United States, the only hope for the rag-tag resistance is a trio of cybernetic ninjas, rushed into the field after a short period of intense development. Essentially a remake of Taito's 1987 title The Ninja Warriors, this is a side-scrolling fighter with large, detailed sprites, plenty of variety and a challenging difficulty level. Elsewhere in the world, the game was entitled Ninja Warriors: The New Generation.

The cover for The Ninja Warriors Again portrays the three controllable android characters – the massive Ninja, the female robot Kunoichi and the lithe and swift Kamaitachi – as they prepare to take on the vast enemy legions. Despite the fact that all three characters are shown fighting side-by-side in the artwork, the game only offers solo play.

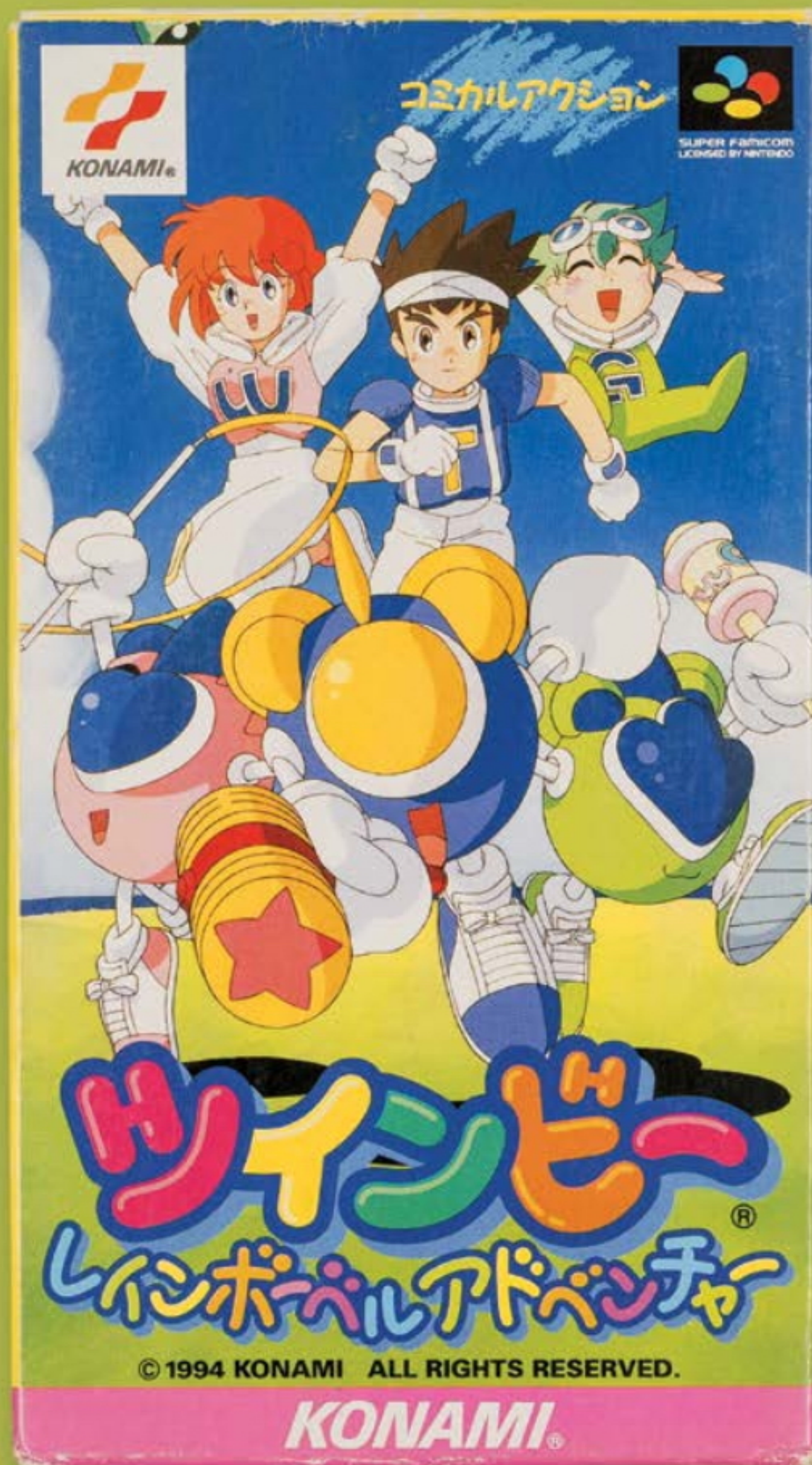
THUNDER SPIRITS

サンダースピリッツ
TECHNOSOFT / INVICTUS /
TOSHIBA EMI (1991)
GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP



Fighting for the Galaxy Federation, we're given control of a small fighter ship on a mission to defeat the ORN Empire. To do so, we need to clear five planets (Hydra, Gorgon, Seiren, Haides and Ellis), and destroy the cloaking devices being used to conceal the Empire's headquarters. Your newly designed ship is small enough to avoid detection by Cerberus, the Empire's defence system, yet has enough fire power to destroy the cloaking devices. Only once all five planets have been beaten, can you infiltrate the Empire's base. Due to the popularity of the Mega Drive's Thunder Force III, Technosoft modified the game and released Thunder Force AC for Japanese arcades, and Thunder Spirits is the Super Famicom port of that coin-op.

This wonderfully illustrated landscape box depicts a surreal alien landscape, with plant-like aliens, pink skies and prehistoric foliage. It's a well-executed design that makes good use of the box dimensions, and perfectly encapsulates the frenetic gameplay within.



TWINBEE – RAINBOW BELL ADVENTURE

ツインビー レインボーベルアドベンチャー
KONAMI (1994)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

TwinBee – Rainbow Bell Adventure was Konami's first attempt at diversifying the TwinBee franchise, which – up to this point – had been solely focused on the shooting genre. This 1994 effort takes the heroic trio of Twinbee, Winbee and Gwinbee and places them in a side-scrolling environment, giving them chargeable punch attacks to deal with the various enemies they encounter. Other weapons are available, including a long-range projectile attack which is more in keeping the shooter lineage of the franchise. Power-ups help add a bit of variety, and each character offers a different gameplay experience to encourage replayability.

The adorable cover art for TwinBee – Rainbow Bell Adventure sums up the game pretty effectively, displaying the iconic ships – now complete with legs as well as arms – and their respective human pilots. Interestingly, the game never saw release in North America but would receive a European airing in the same year it launched in Japan.

UCHŪ NO KISHI – TEKKAMAN BLADE

宇宙の騎士 テッカマンブレード
SOTSU AGENCY / TATSUNOKO PRO /
INTERBEC (1993)
GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP/ BEAT 'EM UP

We are in the year 2300 AD, and Earth is under attack from Tekkaman Omega, leader of the Radam, whose alien forces are composed of evil bug-like creatures and armoured warriors, the Tekkamen. The Tekkamen are actually humans, brainwashed and transformed into a terrible fighting force by a special crystal, which endows them with superhuman strength and powerful weaponry. However there is one Tekkaman named Blade who defies the commands of Omega. You play as Blade, joining forces with the Space Knights to defend the Earth from Omega's invasion. The game is based on the anime series of the same name (Space Knight Tekkaman Blade) by Mayori Sekijima and Satoru Akahori.

This very typical Japanese artwork makes excellent use of the box's dimensions giving the character Blade and the logo equal prominence. Blade's silhouette is outlined by a green glow of energy, while the colouring of his suit neatly matches the spiky katakana logo and small triangular sections of the box, which provide space for the various logos.

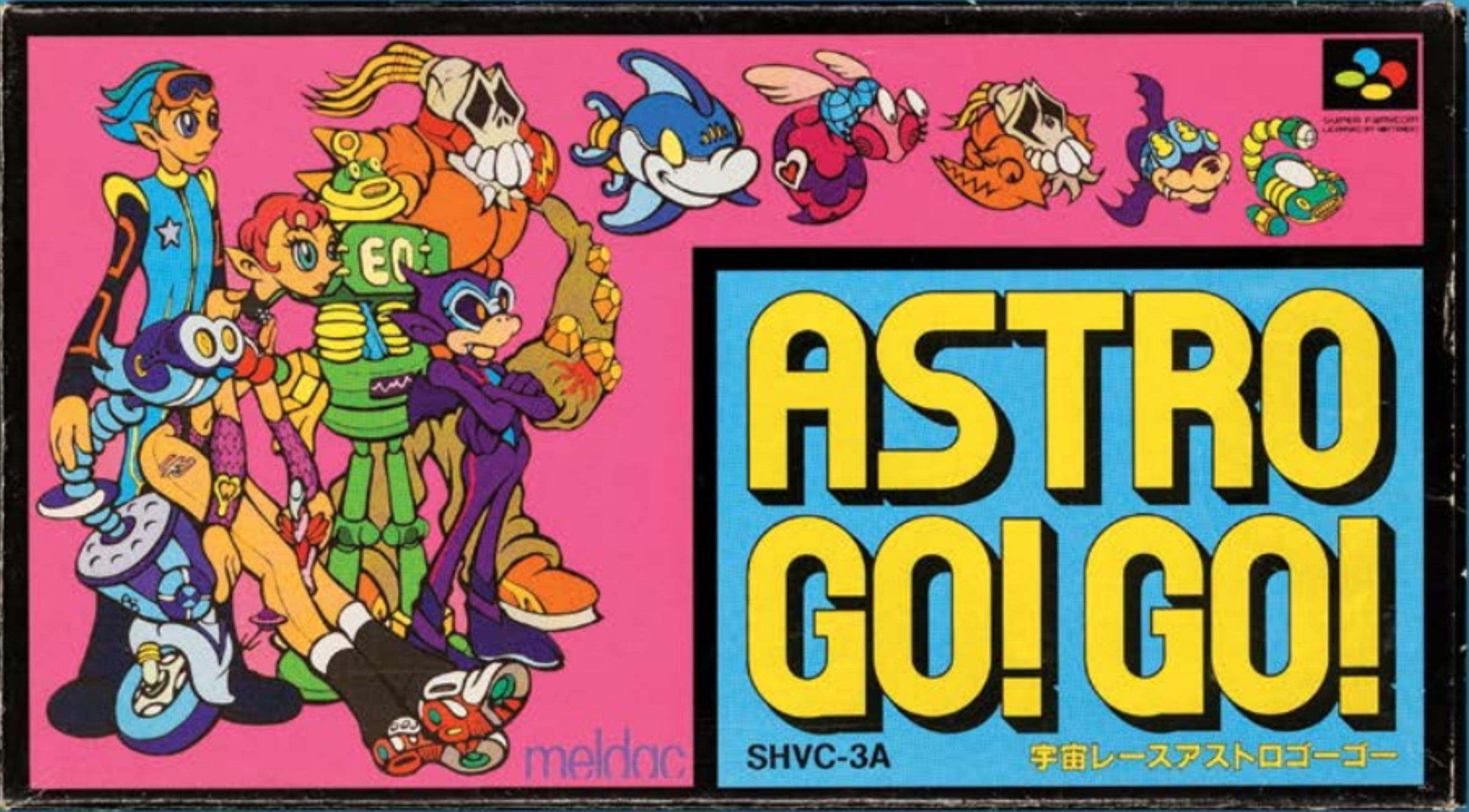


UCHŪ RACE: ASTRO GO! GO!

宇宙レース アストロ ゴー! ゴー!

KAZE / MELDAC (1994)

GENRE: RACING



In this camp and colourful futuristic racer, you get to play as either one of the elf twins, Jet and Love, the skeletal Baribroon, bat hybrid Flyhigh or giant robot E.O. With its Mode 7 graphics and pinball-style track aesthetics, Astro Go! Go! resembles F-Zero but with a visual emphasis on psychedelic sci-fi reminiscent of Barbarella – indeed, the manual even references planet Duran Duran in its back-story. With four tournaments to take part in, 15 courses plus time trials and a colourful track design, Space Race: Astro Go! Go! is an interesting take on the Mode 7 racer template. A North American release was planned under the name Freeway Flyboys, but was cancelled before release.

Astro Go! Go!'s box art is reminiscent of '70s cartoons, with its trippy character design, retro sci-fi typeface and bold and bright colouring. Saturated pinks contrast with primary colours making the artwork and roster of playable characters stand out, while also reflecting the game's vibrant palette.

UMIHARA KAWASE

海腹川背

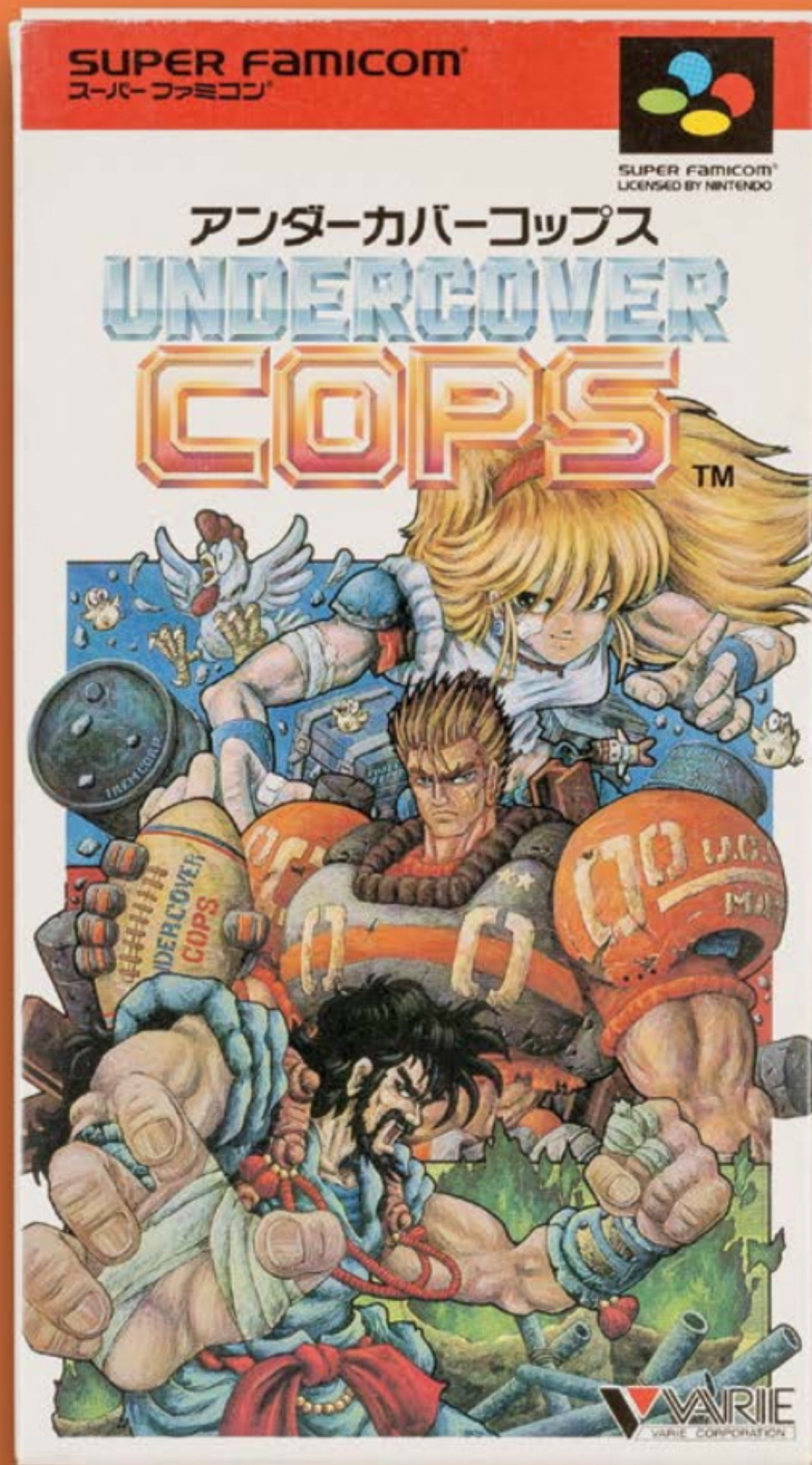
NHK / TNN (1994)

GENRE: PUZZLE / PLATFORM



In this puzzle platformer, we play as the 19-year-old schoolgirl of the title. Dressed in her school uniform and carrying a pink rucksack and fishing rod, Umi-hara has to make her way through the levels Bionic Commando-style, using the fishing line as a means of navigating obstacles and avoiding enemies. She encounters a world of mutated marine creatures – flying or walking fish and oversized eels – mixed with school equipment including giant pencils and rulers, making this a fun and surreal experience. Umi-hara was designed as a troubled, lonely youth, making her a unique and intriguing character. The game's clever physics and unforgiving difficulty have made it something of a cult classic.

Umi-hara Kawase's box features some nice character art, with an emphasis on the calligraphy. A clean white backdrop provides a focus for the text with Umi-hara positioned directly in the centre, looking a little lost and forlorn. The game's surreal setting contrasts with this minimal cover, suggesting that everything we experience in the game may come from Umi-hara's own imagination.



UNDERCOVER COPS

アンダーカバーコップス

REM / VARIE (1995)

GENRE: SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

The year is 2043, and the world has been ravaged by nuclear war. In the grimy, gory, industrial city of Chrono Grande, crime rules and justice and order are subservient to street gangs. To fight back, the government forms a specialised military group of 'City Sweepers', authorised to clean up the streets. Three members of this group – Zan Takahara, Matt Gables and Rosa Felmonde – take the fight to the hordes of thugs and mutants in order to apprehend the city's crime boss, Dr Crayborn.

A variety of perspectives are used in this montage, with Rosa looking larger than Matt, despite being in the background. Likewise, Matt's American Football attire is greatly exaggerated, with giant shoulder pads dwarfing his tiny head. This American comic-book twist on Japanese art gives Undercover Cops a very distinctive look.

USHIO TO TORA

うしおととら

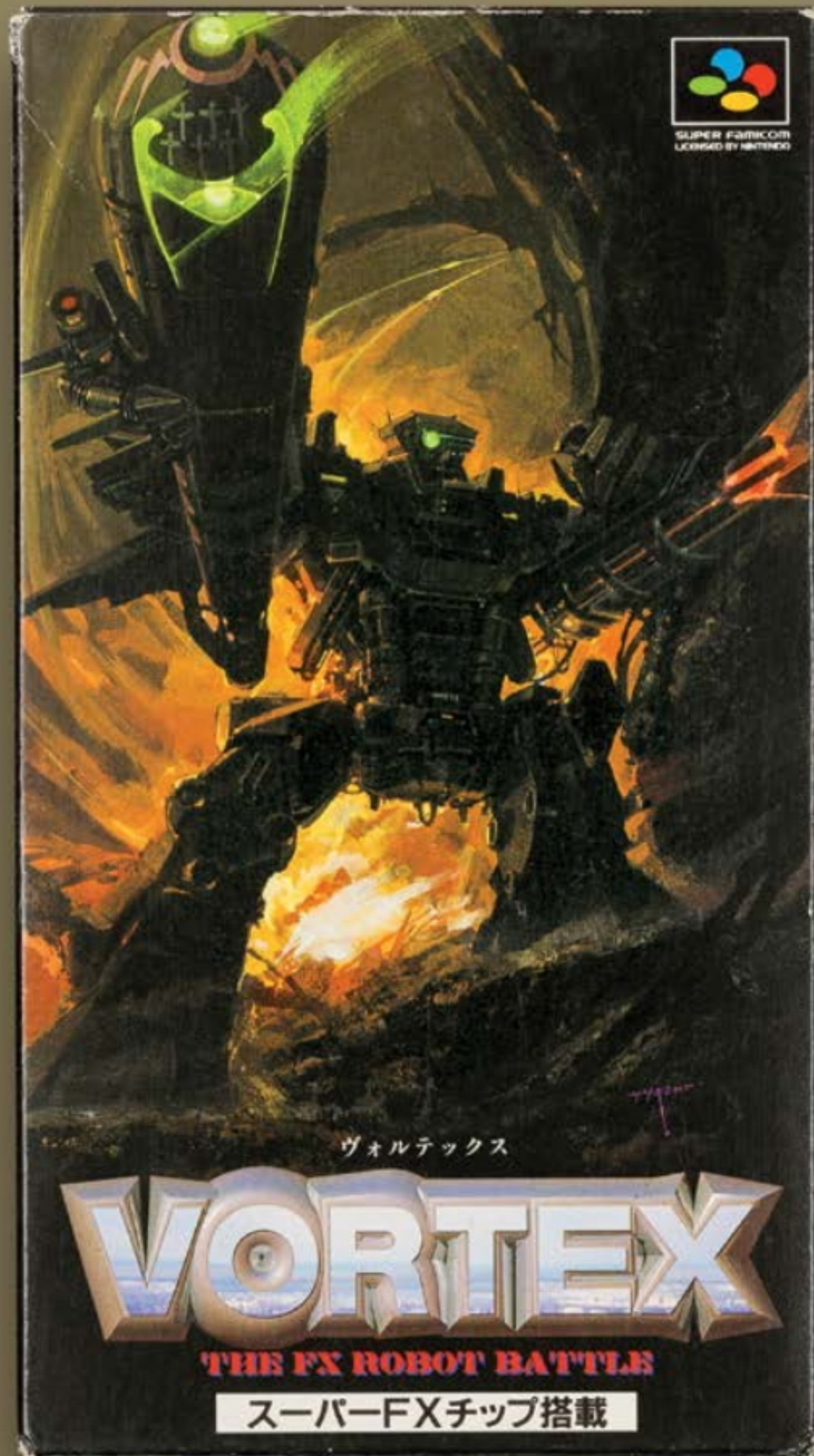
YUTAKA / BANDAI (1993)

GENRE: SCROLLING COMBAT

Based on the popular Japanese manga and anime series, the game tells the story of Ushio Aotsuki, the son of a temple priest, and Tora, a tiger-like demon who was captured by Aotsuki's ancestors and sealed inside a mystical cave for 500 years. Aotsuki stumbles across Tora's cavern and while trying to take the enchanted Beast Spear within, accidentally frees him – along with an assortment of other demons. To defeat this menace, Aotsuki and Tora decide to join forces with the player taking control of either character. The duo must battle the supernatural creatures as they travel from Tokyo to the island of Hokkaido.

This striking box art is taken directly from Kazuhiro Fujita's manga, and depicts Ushio clutching his electrified Beast Spear with Tora standing behind him. Both are illuminated by a source of light, suggesting some sort of supernatural force. Intense reds combine with pinks and purples, all neatly contrasted by the cold blue lettering.





VORTEX – THE FX ROBOT BATTLE

ヴォルテックス ザ・FXロボットバトル
ARGONAUT SOFTWARE /
PACK-IN-VIDEO (1994)
GENRE: 3D SHOOT 'EM UP

Aki-Do forces have stolen a valuable A.I. core, divided it into five parts and secreted the pieces in far flung locations across the galaxy. In this 3D game, powered by the Super FX co-processor, you pilot the experimental Morphing Battle System through seven stages against Aki-Do forces. The MBS transforms between four different modes: Walker, with weapons on both arms; Sonic Jet and Land Burner, best used when speed is required; and Hard Shell, which enables you to move slowly forwards and backwards, and has bombs for taking out multiple foes.

A towering robot stands amongst the debris of a battle-scarred, twisted landscape. The spectacular artistic rendering of the robot's cold, mechanical frame is juxtaposed against a swirling mix of earth and fire, executed in broad, vibrant stokes. Despite the fact that the image bears little resemblance to the colourful polygonal characters within, Vortex's box art ranks as one of the greatest ever created for the console. Naturally, the Western release ditched this in favour of a more accurate, though somewhat prosaic, take on the game.

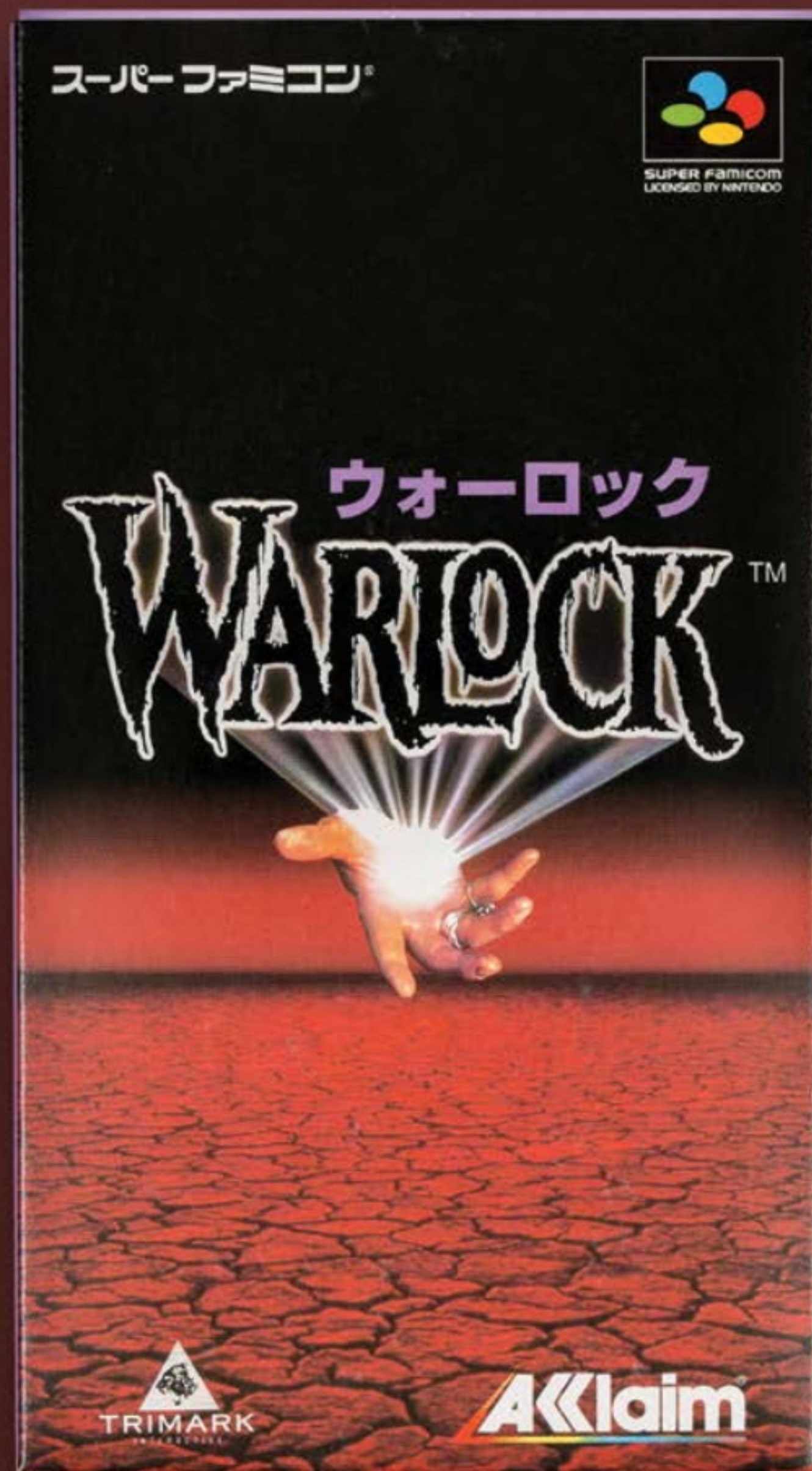
V.W. VERNE WORLD

ヴェルヌワールド
DUAL / BANPRESTO (1995)
GENRE: RPG

V.W. Verne World is a Japanese RPG set in the year 2028. Two brothers win tickets to visit Verne World, a sprawling high-tech theme park of interconnecting islands, based on the works of author Jules Verne. Shortly after their arrival, however, something goes terribly wrong: the site's attractions and robots turn against the holidaymakers, trapping everyone inside the park. The brothers must escape and help others they encounter as they navigate their way across each of the park's sci-fi-themed areas. The duo has to defeat a series of surreal characters, and their adventure culminates with a showdown against a robotic version of the titular French novelist.

Yoshiyuki Takani's stunning box art displays the game's key characters set against the backdrop of the theme park itself. With a style akin to an old-school adventure book, his character studies breathe life into the little pixelated characters featured within the game.





WARLOCK

ウォーロック

REALTIME ASSOCIATES /

TRIMARK INTERACTIVE /

ACCLAIM JAPAN (1995)

GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

A warlock flees from the 17th to the 20th century, with a witch hunter in hot pursuit. We play as Giles Redferne, the Scottish witch hunter who must employ the sorcery inherited from his ancestors to travel through time to retrieve six ancient runestones, which imbue their possessor with the power to destroy the Earth. Once every 1,000 years, the sun and moon come into alignment, and the Evil One sends his son, the Warlock, to locate the runestones. Using his armoury of spells, Giles must prevent the Warlock from possessing them.

Warlock uses the original Super Nintendo artwork but reveals the design in full by using the box in portrait and removing any borders. The imagery has dated over the years, giving it a 1980s VHS feel – which is fitting, given the 1989 David Twohy movie on which the game is based.

WILD GUNS

ワイルドガンズ

NATSUME (1994)

GENRE: SHOOTING

In this steampunk rendition of the Wild West, we're out to wreak revenge on a murderous gang that attacked and killed a family member. Playing as either Lady Outlaw Annie or Cowboy Clint, the Cabal-style gameplay includes gang members, armoured vehicles and robots of all shapes and sizes. Weapons range from pistols and dynamite to machine guns and grenade launchers in this terrific sci-fi Western shooter from Japanese developers, Natsume.

Clint and Annie share the cover with a terrific Wild West-styled logo, complete with wood grain, steel studs and bullet holes. The Japanese box also features accurate character art, with Clint's sci-fi armour and poncho, whereas the Western box has Clint dressed in a leather hat, neckerchief and waistcoat (albeit with slightly more dynamic artwork).





WONDER PROJECT J: KIKAI NO SHŌNEN PINO

ワンダープロジェクトJ 機械の少年ピーノ
ALMANIC / ENIX (1994)
GENRE: POINT 'N' CLICK ADVENTURE

This 'Raising Sim' by Almanic follows the story of Pino, a half robot, half human character known as a Gijin. For over 50 years, Gijin and humans shared a harmonious relationship, but as time passed, resentment grew within the human society. Robots were ostracised by the King and his soldiers, and humans sympathetic to Gijin are arrested. The game requires the player to raise Pino by interacting with others on the Island of Kolulo and help teach him what it means to be human.

Illustrated by Toshihiro Kawamoto (Cowboy Bebop, Fullmetal Alchemist), this charming Studio Ghibli-inspired painting contains a wide array of the game's characters by discretely positioning each in and around Pino as he runs through his village. Cinematic Japanese anime is effortlessly blended with European character design, bringing the game closer to its source: the Carlo Collodi's 'Adventures of Pinocchio'.

WRECKING CREW '98

レッキングクルー'98
FAX SOFTNICA / NINTENDO (1998)
GENRE: PUZZLE

This follow-up to the 8-bit classic was originally released as a download-only title for the Satellaview unit. However its popularity led to a limited run of boxed copies, complete with manual. The game is a sequel to the original, which is also included as a bonus. But unlike its predecessor, in which the player's objective was to find ways to clear each level of all panels, Wrecking Crew '98 adopts a competitive, two-column Tetris-style layout in which two opponents are given their own sides to clean up. The game features some old faces as well as new foes, including Foreman Spike, Gotcha Wrench and Eggplant Man.

The cover art features Mario in all his pixelated glory smashing through a brick wall. This hastily designed cover was made after the game's Satellaview release and with no original artwork commissioned, the developers have opted for a simple Photoshop job, combining a poor quality screengrab of the title screen with brick wall artwork. This physical release of Wrecking Crew '98 remains a highly collectible piece of Mario history.





XANDRA NO DAIBŌKEN: VALKYRIE TO NO DEAI

サンドラの大冒険 ワルキューレとの出逢い
NOVA GAMES / NAMCO (1992)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

Krino Xandra, or Whirlo as he's better known in the West, was previously a minor character in Namco's Adventure of Valkyrie: The Legend of the Key of Time. In this sequel (Xandra's Great Adventure: Encounter with the Valkyrie), Xandra lives a peaceful life in the countryside of Mavel with his wife and son, until a volcano erupts. People begin to die from a hideous withering disease as a result of the toxic dust released during the eruption. Xandra's son is infected and so he must set out on a journey to find a mythical cure.

With its white frame and pink borders, Xandra's cover illustration sits perfectly on the box, leaving space for the colourful logo. The image is nicely balanced with its harmonious greens and blues, and the hand-drawn artwork isn't just exclusive to the box; the manual also includes a wide range of detailed illustrations of characters and settings, making it a richer gaming experience. It's an excellent game with suitably high-quality artwork to match.

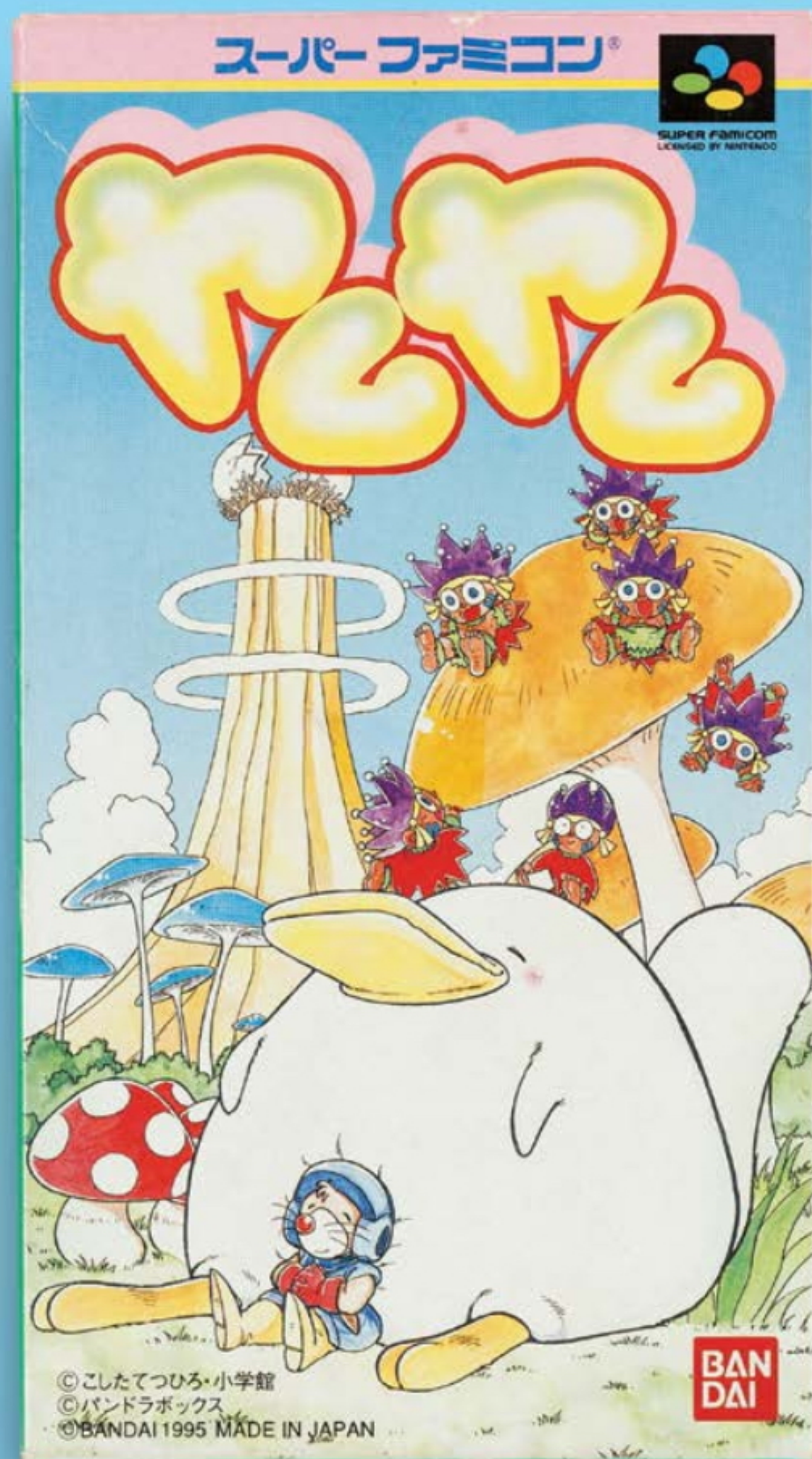
XARDION CHŌKŌ GASSHIN

超攻合神 サードイオン
JORUDAN / ASMIK (1992)
GENRE: PLATFORM COMBAT

In Super Attack God Xardion, The Alpha 1 Federation is in threat of invasion from the artificial world NGC-1611. You take charge of robots Triton, Panthera and Alcedes – each of whom has different skills – in order to destroy the enemy. NGC-1611 is run by supercomputers which, on the dying wishes of the planet's founder, protect his daughter from any intruders. The supercomputers were at a loss when the scientist's daughter died shortly after her father's passing, and therefore created a holographic image of her which they now guard. Events have since escalated, and the artificial intelligence's strategy is now to attack Alpha 1. You play as each of the three robots, and can switch between them as the situation requires. You must end the offensive by locating the legendary and ultimate robot Xardion, who not only has his own unique abilities, but also those of the other three robots combined.

Xardion comes boxed with eye-wateringly detailed artwork by mech designer and artist, Yasuhiro Moriki. It pictures the Xardion robot, perhaps trying to destroy one of the game's supercomputers by tearing out its cables and releasing clouds of electrified energy. The game also came packaged with a postcard showcasing more of Moriki's stunning artwork.





YAM YAM

ヤムヤム

FANDORA BOX / BANDAI (1995)

GENRE: SHOOT 'EM UP / ADVENTURE

In this fun and quirky game you play as Magu Magu, a mole-boy who travels with an unusual pet named Yam Yam. Together, the pair journey through various towns in order to fulfill a range of tasks and missions set by the locals. The townsfolk are quite a demanding lot, and set a range of chores that include chatting to particular townspeople and giving away your hard-earned money in order to move on to one of the 28 missions. Poor Yam Yam is even required to carry folk round inside his belly, which, as can be seen on the box, is suitably spacious. By riding on Yam Yam's back, Magu Magu can defeat monsters of various guises, and as a reward will receive healing herbs or gold bars, which can be spent on weapons or special powers to further aid in your missions. Yam Yam was a Japanese-only release.

Yam Yam's irresistibly cute and colourful box illustration by Tetsuhiro Koshita presents our two heroes soaking up the sun, in an art style evocative of surreal French comics. The manual is also beautifully illustrated, containing characters, a comic strip and, on the last page, a large illustration of Magu Magu and Yam Yam, scanning the land in search of adventure.

YOSHI NO COOKIE

ヨッシーのクッキー

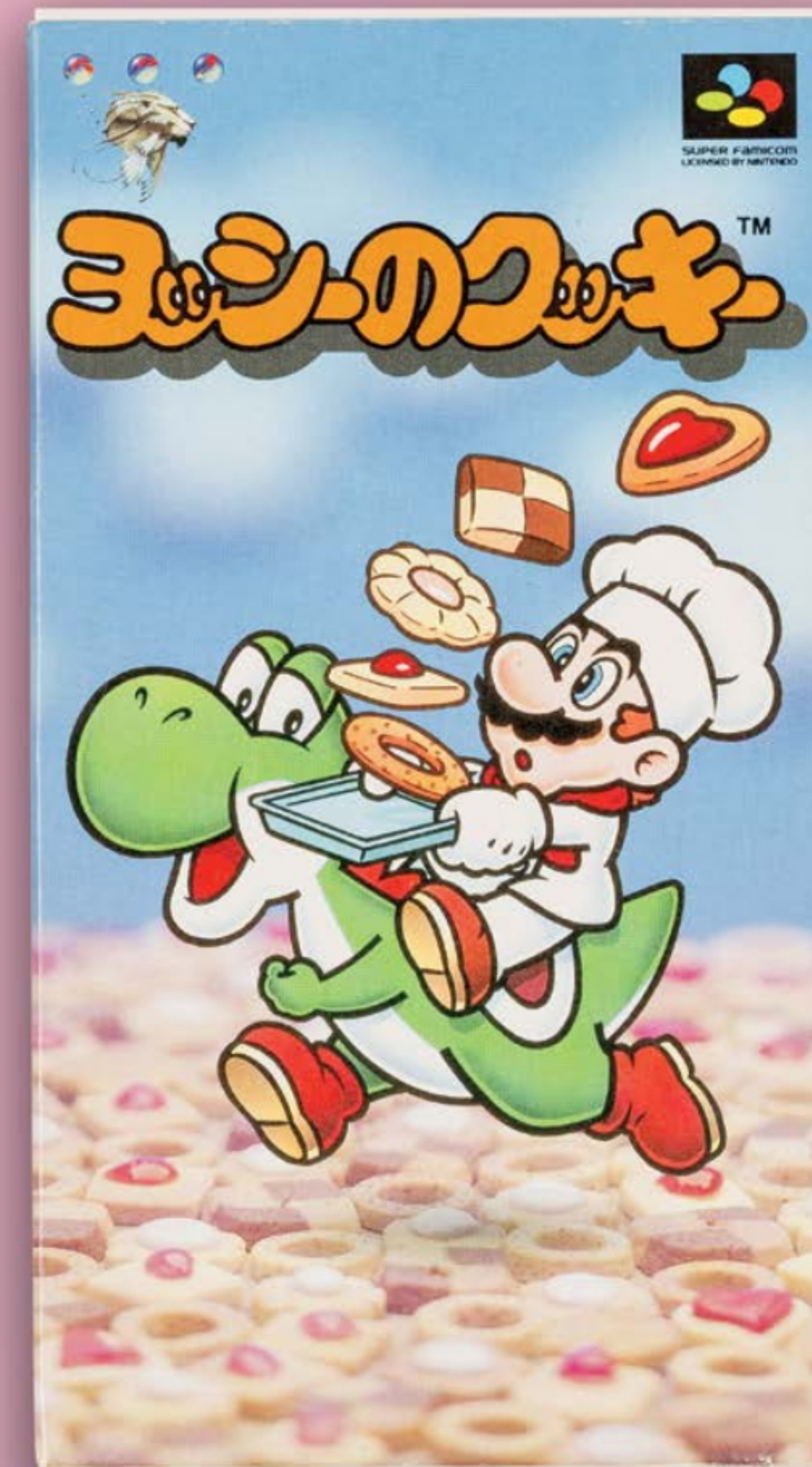
HOME DATA / BULLET-PROOF SOFTWARE

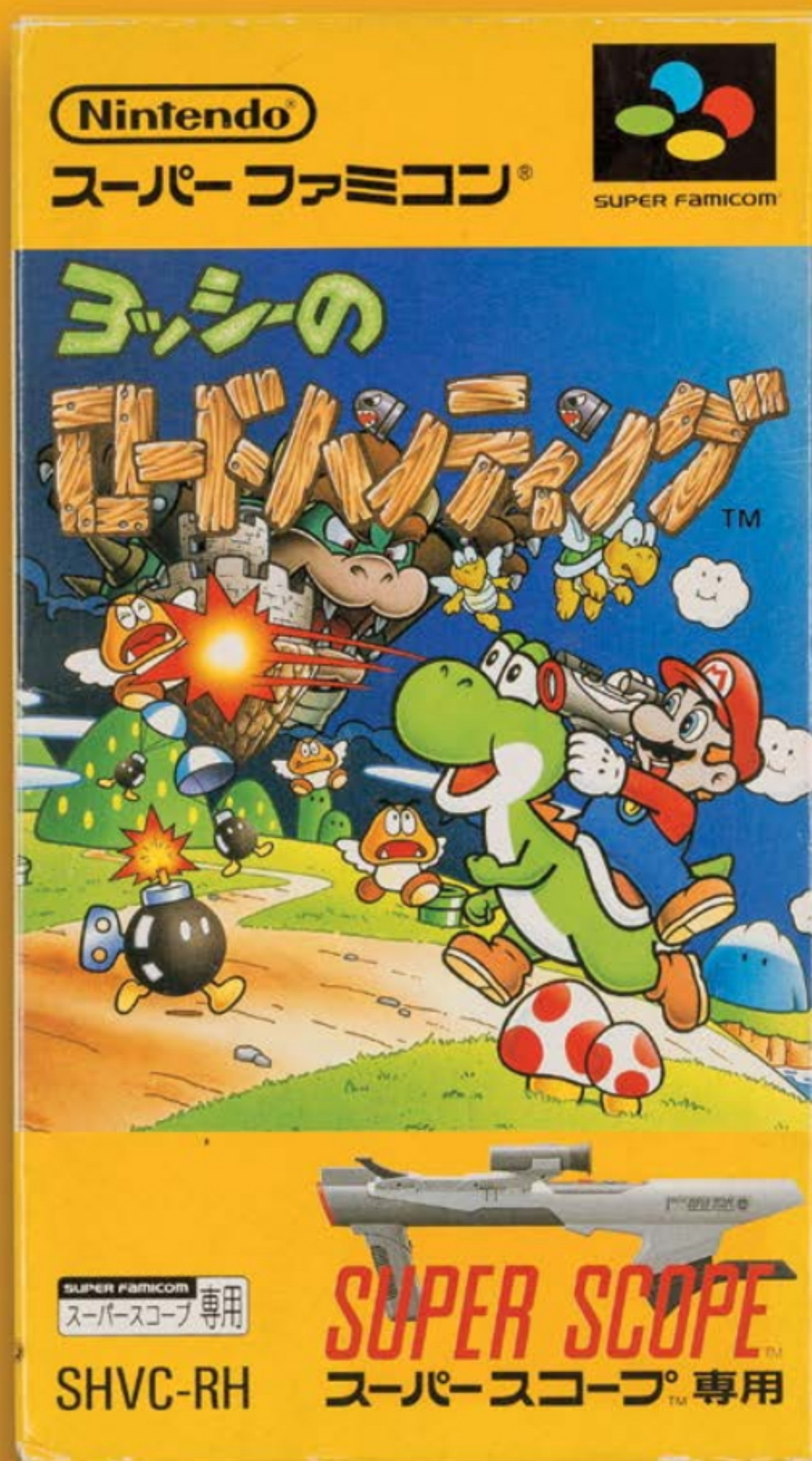
(1993)

GENRE: PUZZLE

Yoshi's Cookie is a tile-matching game published by BPS, a company best known for its Tetris games. Five various types of cookies appear randomly within a square chamber, and the objective is to clear the playing field of all cookies. This is achieved by mixing cookies with their corresponding flavour, which removes each row. Two identical versions were released for the Super Famicom in Japan: the commercial release (pictured) and a special edition entitled Yoshi's Cookie Kuruppon Oven de Cookie, which celebrated the release of the Panasonic Kuruppon Oven. Developed by National Human Electronics with Nintendo's permission, only 500 copies of this version were created and feature the same artwork, but with a small photograph of the oven on the box.

The combination of using photography with illustrations works fantastically well, with chef Mario and Yoshi bounding across a landscape of real-life cakes and biscuits. A shadow effect is applied beneath Yoshi and the photography has a nice depth-of-field effect, which blends both images to create a memorable and unique Nintendo-themed cover.





YOSHI NO ROAD HUNTING

ヨッシーのロードハンティング
NINTENDO (1993)
GENRE: LIGHT GUN SHOOT 'EM UP

Designed by Shigeru Miyamoto, Yoshi's Safari features Mario and Yoshi as they attempt to rescue King Fret and Prince Pine of Jewellery Land from Bowser and his army of Koopalings. Played using the Super Scope light gun peripheral, the action is portrayed from the perspective of Mario as he rides on Yoshi's back, blasting enemies and defeating an array of bizarre end-of-level bosses. The U.S. release is notable for the first appearance of Princess Peach under that name — prior to this, she'd always been known as Princess Toadstool.

Mario and Yoshi are pictured on the cover as they blast away at Goombas, Koopas and Bob-ombs, with a giant Bowser leaping out from behind a floating castle. This '80s Famicom-styled box art was exclusive to Japan, with a different illustration and logo used in the West.

ZOKU: THE LEGEND OF BISHIN

美神伝説 ZOKU
MAGIFACT (1993)
GENRE: RACING / SCROLLING BEAT 'EM UP

In 2020, Japan's mount Fuji erupts, devastating the city of Neo Tokyo and leaving the metropolis in near ruins. A lawless society grows from the wastelands, with violent gangs holding the city in their grip. We play as either boxer Koji or ex-gang member Risa as they drive through the city in their nitro-powered sports car and battling with gang members. Their ultimate aim is the destruction of the female-dominated clan known as the Bishin and its leader Ryoko.

Katsuya Terada's Mad Max-inspired cover art is a miniature movie poster in its own right, with Koji and Risa pictured against a neon-soaked cityscape. Beneath them, gang members pursue the player's car while the Bishin clan's leader, Ryoko, looms menacingly in a Dracula-esque pose. Terada's flame-engulfed action scene contains a ferocious intensity, and is nicely contrasted by the cool blues of our moonlit heroes. It's a masterful example of visual storytelling.



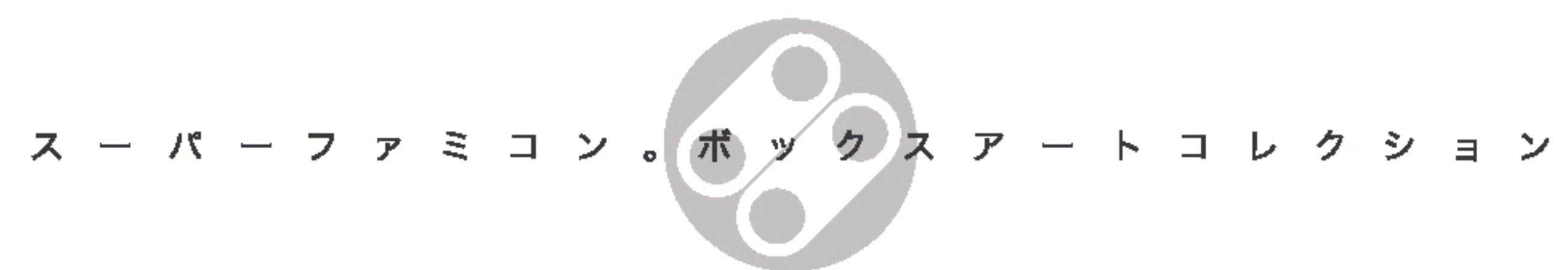
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and to my friends, fellow gamers, family and especially to Zuleika for her patience and endless support.



IT WASN'T EASY BEING A NINTENDO FAN IN THE EARLY 90S:

THE WONDERFUL SUPER FAMICOM WAS RELEASED IN EUROPE AS THE SUPER NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM, BUT IT WAS HOBbled BY A BORDERED, 50HZ IMAGE AND DELAYED RELEASE SCHEDULE. TRUE NINTENDO FANS GOT HOLD OF A JAPANESE CONSOLE AND BOUGHT THEIR GAMES ON THE GREY IMPORT MARKET.

As well as the benefits of faster, smoother, full-screen gameplay, Japanese Super Famicom cartridges came in beautiful portrait-shaped boxes, rather than the landscape packaging sold in Europe and North America. The stylish, intricate Japanese designs were almost always superior to those afforded the Western releases.

As a celebration of this unique artwork, Bitmap Books is proud to present Super Famicom: The Box Art Collection – a compilation of Japanese game packaging, professionally shot and presented as a glorious hardback edition. The book features 260 titles including many rare examples and some that have never before been documented in print. Sourced from the archives of renowned collector, Stuart Brett (aka Super Famicom Guy), each box is beautifully presented life-size, with an overview of the game and critique of the artwork. The book also features several interviews with other collectors, who explain their love of the format.

Super Famicom: The Box Art Collection is an unmissable treat for anyone who had a passion for Nintendo's 16-bit games console, and who came to embrace the distinctive Japanese artwork adorning these iconic games.

